

Mark 10:1–12 — Jesus On Divorce

October 27, 2019

Currently 42-45 percent of marriages end in divorce. That is actually a slight improvement from 20 years ago when some claim as many as 50 percent of marriages ended in divorce. Statistically almost every one of us will be touched by divorce either in our immediate family or in our extended family. Today we are going to study this important topic.

Before we turn to our the text, let me share some interesting divorce statistics I ran across this week.

What do you think is the average age of divorce? Do you think it is age 50? Age 40? It is actually 30. Which state do you think has the highest rate of divorce? Arkansas. (With a football team like the Razorbacks, that last won its national title was 1964, I can see why everyone is irritable.) Which state has the lowest rate of divorce? Iowa. (That is probably because the winters are so cold that even if a couple doesn't get along, they are willing to stay together just to keep warm.) Another interesting statistic is the more money people spend on their wedding, the more likely they are to get divorced after their wedding. (I can't wait to remind my daughter of that statistic when she tells me she wants to get married. As the father of a future bride, I hope to use that statistic to save a little money.) What is the greatest contributor to divorce? Many us think it is financial problems. That used to be the case. Today it is social media. One in every three divorces start from online affairs. Be careful with social media.¹

¹ <https://www.mckinleyirvin.com/family-law-blog/2012/october/32-shocking-divorce-statistics/>

Divorce is not just common in our society, but some people are trying to make divorce something to celebrate in our society. Have you heard of divorce parties? They are the latest rage. Just as you have a wedding party at the beginning of a marriage, now people are having divorce parties at the end of a marriage. There is even a [divorce party handbook](#) you can purchase online. I think our society is confused when people think divorce is something to celebrate.

It isn't just society that is confused about divorce but many Christians are often confused about divorce. Some Christians believe divorce should never take place for any reason, while other Christians think divorce is acceptable in God's eyes for any reason at all. As Christians, what should we think about divorce?

Today, we will see what Jesus says about divorce, a topic that touches all of us one way or another.

As a church, we are studying through the Gospel of Mark. This morning, we are in a section of the Gospel of Mark where Jesus teaches his disciples on the topic divorce. Turn in your Bibles to Mark 10:1-12. Follow along in your copy of God's Word as I read the text.

And he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered to him again. And again, as was his custom, he taught them. And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away." And Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. And he said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her,

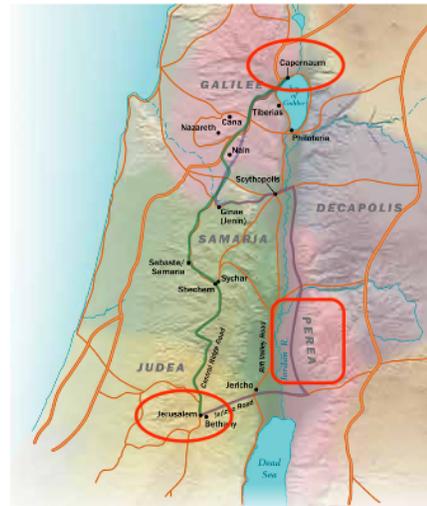
and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”
Mark 10:1–12 (ESV)

We will study through these verses then, at the end, we will widen our lens and see what else the New Testament says on the topic of divorce. Let’s get started.

The Background

And he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered to him again. And again, as was his custom, he taught them.
Mark 10:1 (ESV)

Last week, when we left our study, Jesus was in Capernaum. He had returned from Caesarea Philippi in the north. Jesus was at Peter’s house in Capernaum, which was his home base in Galilee. As we begin Mark 10, Jesus has moved. He had a major geographical jump and moved south to the area of Perea, east of the Jordan River.



As Mark 10 begins, not only is there a major geographical jump in the Jesus story, but there is also a chronological jump. When we left Jesus in Mark 9, Jesus was approximately six months away from his entry into Jerusalem and his crucifixion. When Mark 10 begins, a few months have passed.

Matthew and Mark do not record this, but after leaving Capernaum, Jesus had a separate ministry trip to the area of Judea which eventually brought him to the area of Perea a few months later. Matthew and Mark jump over this trip which happened between the end of Mark 9 and the beginning of Mark 10. Luke and

John include details of Jesus' ministry trip to Judea before the ministry trip to Perea.

I tell you these details to explain why there is a geographical jump and a chronological jump between Mark 9 and 10. I also tell you these details in case you line up the Gospels for the last six months of Jesus' life. If you do that, you will find details of Jesus' final trip to Judea missing in two of the Gospels. That is not an error in Matthew and Mark. They cannot include everything about Jesus, so they chose not to give details about that particular ministry trip of Jesus.

The other thing we learn from this is that Jesus was immensely popular wherever he went. Even when he was in Perea, far from his homeland, Jesus drew a crowd.

The Pharisees tried to trap Jesus on the topic of divorce.

And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" Mark 10:2 (ESV)

Here we have the Pharisees. They were the ultra conservative Jews that dogged Jesus for most of his ministry. Early in this Gospel, they made a decision to kill Jesus. They wanted him dead because his growing popularity was a threat to their power. The closer Jesus got to Jerusalem for Passover, the more interested they were in destroying him. They saw Jesus teaching the crowds so they decided to ask what sounds like an innocent question, but it is actually a loaded question. As Mark says, it was a question to test him. It was a question to trap him. The question was, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"

In the parallel account of this event given in Matthew, it gives us more details on what the Pharisees asked. These additional details are helpful for us to know.

And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” Matthew 19:3 (ESV)

So the question is not just, “Can you divorce your wife?” but “Can you divorce your wife for any reason?” The issue of divorce was a very controversial topic in this day. It was controversial for religious reasons and political reasons.

The topic of divorce was controversial for religious reasons.

In the Mosaic Law, there is only one passage that provides guidelines for divorce. It comes from Deuteronomy 24:1.

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... Deuteronomy 24:1 (ESV)

This allowed a man to divorce his wife if he found something indecent in her. The question was, “What does indecency mean?” There were two schools of thought in the day promoted by two prominent rabbis.

Liberal Rabbi Hillel — This guy made even the most left-wing Democrats of today look conservative. He said indecency could mean anything, therefore a man was allowed to divorce his wife for any reason. Examples he used were as follows: A man was allowed to divorce his wife if she burned his dinner or if he didn’t like the quality of her cooking. A man could divorce his wife if she had her hair down in public or if she allowed someone to see her ankles in the market. A man could divorce his wife if he considered her annoying or if she made a negative comment about her mother-in-law. His most famous claim is that he

believed a man was allowed to divorce his wife if he found someone more attractive.

Rabbi Hillel's view of easy divorce for any and every reason was the popular view in that day. This is why the Pharisees asked Jesus if it was lawful to divorce a wife *for any cause*. It was an easy divorce society. All you needed to do was write your wife a piece of paper letting her know that you divorced her and why you divorced her, then you could send her away. You don't even need a lawyer! There were no legal fees. There was no waiting period. You didn't even need to have the paper notarized. Thankfully, not everyone held that belief. There was another popular rabbi in the day named Shammai. He held a different view on divorce.

Conservative Rabbi Shammai — He was the conservative. He said the term indecency in Deuteronomy 24 referred to any sort of marital impropriety. This meant he didn't believe you could divorce your wife because you didn't like the quality of her cooking. The indecency in her needed to be some kind of sexual misconduct, such as a wife shamefully exposing some of herself in public and showing off too much ankle or talking with other men in public.

Understand Rabbi Hillel and Rabbi Shammai believed it was appropriate to divorce a wife long before an act of adultery was committed. Adultery was far more serious. According to the Mosaic law, adulterers were not to be divorced. They were to face death. You didn't need to worry about divorcing your adulterous wife because she would be the dead adulterous wife.

If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. Leviticus 20:10 (ESV)

So divorce for adultery was a no-brainer because people were originally killed for an affair. In this day, under Roman rule, the Jews couldn't execute anyone for adultery, so divorce for adultery was expected. This is similar to what Joseph planned to do when he found out Mary was pregnant with Jesus. He assumed she committed adultery. Since he was gracious, he planned to divorce her quietly, not divorce her publicly to humiliate her, which is what usually happened.

So it is in the context of this conservative-liberal debate on divorce and what were the allowable reasons for divorce that the Pharisees tried to trap Jesus. In that day, most people held the view of Rabbi Hillel, which is that divorce was allowed for something as simple as a wife burning dinner. The Pharisees knew Jesus didn't hold that liberal view. They knew Jesus held an extremely conservative view on divorce. Jesus already taught his conservative view on divorce in public. He taught it back in Matthew 5:39. So the Pharisees wanted to trap Jesus by getting him to state his conservative view on divorce in what was an ultra liberal part of the world. It was as if they were trying to get him to hold a Trump Make America Great Again Rally at the University of California, Berkeley. You know that will not go well because everyone will turn again the person that is speaking. That is the setup they were using to try to turn people against Jesus.

To illustrate this casual attitude toward divorce in Jesus' day, let me read for you from Josephus. He was a Jewish historian who lived in the time of Jesus. Studying what Josephus wrote at that time is like reading a newspaper from that

day. We can see how people thought about life. Look how Josephus wrote about divorce.

He that desires to be divorced from his wife for any cause whatsoever (and many such causes happen among men), let him in writing give assurance that he will never use her as his wife any more; for by this means she may be at liberty to marry another husband, although before this bill of divorce be given, she is not to be permitted so to do. (Josephus, Ant. 4.8.23 §253)

Just give her a piece of paper and send her walking down the road.

Divorce was that casual in Jesus' day.

The topic of divorce was controversial for political reasons.

There is probably another reason why the Pharisees brought up the topic of divorce in the area of Perea. This was the area where John the Baptist baptized many people in the Jordan River. It was the territory controlled by Herod Antipas and his wife, Herodias. If you remember from Mark 6, when John the Baptist was critical of Herod Antipas because he divorced his first wife, the daughter of King Aretas, for no cause to marry the wife of his brother, named Herodias, things did not go well for John. Herod had John arrested for being critical of his casual divorce and remarriage. Not only did Herod Antipas divorce his first wife for no good reason, but Herodias,] divorced Herod Antipas' brother Herod Phillip for no good reason other than to marry her husband's brother! These casual, no-fault divorces were having people switch spouses faster than some people change their socks!

When John the Baptist was critical of Herod and Herodias' divorcing their spouses without cause to marry one another, Herod arrested John the Baptist. Later, Herodias manipulated circumstances to kill John the Baptist. The

Pharisees were hoping that if Jesus would publicly state his opposition to easy divorce since he was under Herod's nose, maybe Herod would arrest Jesus and Herodias would kill Jesus just like that sick couple did to John the Baptist.

So the Pharisees brought up the topic of divorce because they were hoping to turn Herod and Herodias, the adulterous rulers of this area, against Jesus. They were also hoping to turn the people against Jesus because frequent divorce and easy divorce was the common practice of the day.

Most people in that day they thought of their marital contracts the way we think of a rental agreement. You are only in it as long as it benefitted you. Once you don't need it, you let it go.

Jesus explained the danger of divorce by explaining the permanence of marriage.

He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away." Mark 10:3–4 (ESV)

Here is where the rub comes. Jesus asked the Pharisees what Moses commanded them about divorce. They answered from Deuteronomy 24, telling Jesus that Moses *allowed* a man or *permitted* a man to divorce his wife by giving her a certificate of divorce and sending her away.

Here is Jesus' point. Did Moses command anyone to divorce his wife? Absolutely not. Moses never *commanded* divorce. Moses only *permitted* divorce because of the sinfulness of the Israelites' hearts. God wrote this passage through Moses as a concession to the sinfulness of human hearts. Divorce was never part of God's plan for a married couple's life. Recognizing that because of that sin sometimes relationships break down so badly that divorce becomes the lesser of two evils, Moses permitted divorce.

Remember this passage never commands a man to divorce his wife. Divorce was never part of God's plan for marriage or desire for marriage. Divorce was only permitted because of the terrible sinfulness of hearts that destroyed a marriage to the point that divorce eventually became the lesser of two evils.

The other thing Jesus pointed out is that Deuteronomy 24, which is the only passage in the Mosaic law that teaches on divorce, *was not written to give men reason why they can get divorced. It was written to provide guidelines to limit the damage of divorce.* Let's look at Deuteronomy 24:1-4, which is the entire unit of thought and you will see what I mean.

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, and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, 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, then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the Lord. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance. Deuteronomy 24:1–4 (ESV)

The Pharisees looked at one word in the first verse and saw it as a green light to divorce a wife for any indecency. Jesus wanted them to read the entire paragraph. The purpose of the paragraph is not to give men a reason to divorce. It is to put protections in place for women who undergo a divorce.

1. **These verses discourage hasty divorces by making the man explain the reason for the divorce and put it in writing.** This discourages a man from divorcing his wife just because he is upset. Those of you who are married, have you ever had a knock-down-drag-out fight with your spouse and you get to the end of it and you don't even remember what started the argument?

Forcing a man to write the reason for the divorce on the certificate of divorce made sure he had a real reason for the divorce, not just his immature emotions.

- 2. These verses require a certificate of divorce for divorce so it would protect a woman's dignity and she would be protected against her former husband ruining her future.** Without that certificate of divorce, when a woman tried to remarry, her former husband could easily say she couldn't remarry because she was still his wife. The certificate of divorce safeguarded women from rotten husbands that wanted to keep reaching into their lives and interfering with their lives.
- 3. These verses made it impossible for a husband to remarry his former wife after she moved into another relationship.** Of course, a husband could remarry his former wife after he divorced her but only before she moved on to a different husband. Once she remarried, she was off-limits to him forever. A man better think hard about divorcing his wife because once she moves on, there is no getting her back. That discouraged hasty divorces.

So the Pharisees were looking at these verses saying they could divorce their wives for any indecency. Jesus said, "The purpose of these verses was not to give you a green light for divorce but to provide protection for women so they would not be exploited by a husband who sought a divorce."

And Jesus said to them, Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. Mark 10:5 (ESV)

Jesus said, "You guys need to understand that the reason Moses wrote these verses in the first place was because of your hard-hearted sinfulness that

led to marital breakdowns.” That same hard-hearted sinfulness was alive and well in Jesus’ day as men used Deuteronomy 24 as an excuse to kick their wives to the curb. How does God feel about divorce? The last Old Testament prophet told us.

“I hate divorce,” says the Lord God of Israel... Malachi 2:16 (NIV84)

God says, “I never like divorce.” Nobody wins in divorce. Divorce is always a hard thing, therefore it should never be treated as a casual thing like the people in Israel were doing in that day. Then Jesus explained why divorce is always so hard on people.

But from the beginning of creation, “God made them male and female.” “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” So they are no longer two but one flesh. Mark 10:6–8 (ESV)

Jesus turned not to Deuteronomy but to Genesis to determine God’s will for marriage. In Jewish thinking, the earlier you go in the Bible, the greater weight of your argument. Jesus went right back to creation itself and the way God designed marriage to work. The Genesis text on marriage takes precedence over the Deuteronomy text on divorce. Here are the points Jesus made about why divorce is so devastating and should not be treated casually.

1. **God created marriage to be a permanent bond.** Jesus said God made them male and female. God created one man and one woman. He created them for one another. God officiated the first marriage. God created Adam and Eve to be together and to stay together. Adam and Eve’s marriage set the pattern for marriage as God intended. God didn’t make Eve, Sally, and Greta so Adam could divorce one woman and have a different woman every

20 years. God created one man and one woman for life. In fact, divorce and remarriage were originally impossible. God didn't create anyone else for Adam to marry. Marriage was created by God to be for life. It was created to be a permanent bond between one man and one woman for life. Divorce is so painful because it takes a bond God created to be permanent and breaks it. There is no way to escape pain when that happens. That is why divorce can never be a casual thing.

- 2. Marriage makes a new family unit with bonds so close that all other family relationships come after it.** It says a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife. Marriage creates such a significant bond that a man and woman leave their parents. The bond created by marriage is a bond that is greater than your relationship with your parents. A couple's loyalty to one another is to be a higher loyalty than to their biological families. That is why they leave their homes and begin their own home when they marry. A couple begins a new family together. This is why breaking the bond of marriage is so serious. It doesn't just break a marriage apart but it breaks a family apart, a family bond that is even stronger than the bond you have with your parents. This is why divorce is always painful. You can see the pain of this broken family bond when there are children involved. Children are heartbroken when their parents separate. Children will do almost anything to keep their parents from separating. Children do not want to lose that family bond. This is why divorce is not a casual thing. This is why you cannot change marriages like you are changing your clothes.

3. **Marriage transforms two people into one.** Twice Jesus quoted from Genesis saying that in marriage, a couple is no longer two human beings but they become one human being. This is not just a reference to sexuality between a couple but is a reference to a literal bonding that happens between a couple through marriage. This bond that happens between a married couple is so strong they function not as two human beings but as one human being because their lives are so woven together. As I was thinking how to illustrate this, I kept thinking of conjoined twins. They are two people that are one flesh. Imagine the pain and suffering that would take place if you tried to tear conjoined twins apart. Most conjoined twins would not survive being torn apart. Divorce is devastating in the same way. Two people have become one flesh. Tearing them apart is extremely painful and sometimes emotionally fatal. That is why divorce is never a casual thing. It is always a tragic thing.



4. **Marriage can only be between one man and one woman.** I should also mention that since God is the creator of the institution of marriage and God defined marriage, he has a right to define the way it works. In Genesis 2:24, God defined marriage as only between one man and one woman. Today, everyone wants to redefine marriage. They think if we can just get the government to pass a few laws, we can change marriage to be between two men or two women. The problem is the United States government didn't create marriage. The government doesn't have the right to redefine marriage.

God created marriage in Genesis. Marriage was around long before our country existed. God, as the creator of marriage, defines it as between one man and one woman.

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. Genesis 2:24 (ESV)

The idea that we get to redefine marriage is completely foreign to the Bible. We have to submit to God's design for marriage.

5. In marriage, God seals a couple together.

What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate. Mark 10:9 (ESV)

The word joined means yoked. It is the picture of two oxen working in the field together. They are yoked together. They are bound together and cannot get apart. If they work together, they are powerful. If they fight one another in the yoke, things are terrible. When a couple marries, the Bible tells us there is something supernatural that takes place. God yokes them together. God supernaturally joins a couple together so they work together as a powerful team, a team that is much more powerful together than they are on their own.

Since God is the one who yokes a couple together in marriage, don't let a man try and tear a couple apart and break the marriage bond. When a human being tries to tear apart a marriage, he or she is tearing apart something God put together. He or she is fighting God's work. That is never a good idea. This is why God is always grieved by divorce. God never wants to see a marriage break down. When we have friends around us going through difficult times in their marriages, we always need to encourage them to stay together. We need to help

them work through the difficult patches, not tear them apart. If we try to tear them apart, we are fighting against something God has made.

So we see Jesus has a very high view of marriage and that divorce should never be a casual thing because God created marriage to be a permanent and powerful relationship. God literally fuses people together in marriage.

Jesus says those who divorce and marry another commit adultery.

And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. And he said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.” Mark 10:10–12 (ESV)

At this point, the conflict with the Pharisees was over. Jesus left them speechless. Jesus was in a house with his disciples. We know that whenever Jesus and his disciples were in a house in the Gospel of Mark, that is time when Jesus was giving his disciples additional training that he wasn’t giving to the general public. Jesus clearly explained to the disciples the permanence of marriage.

Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. A woman who divorces her husband and marries another commits adultery against him. That is a high bar! I love the way the apostles reacted to this, because they understood exactly what Jesus meant about the permanence of the bond of marriage.

The disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” Matthew 19:10 (ESV)

“Are you crazy? Jesus, you mean there is no way out of marriage? Marriage is that permanent?”

Before we go too far in this direction, some of you may remember there are other passages in the Gospels where Jesus said the exact same thing about the permanence of the marriage but he threw in an exception clause. What is that talking about?

What is the divorce exception clause?

And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery. Matthew 19:9 (ESV)

Twice in Matthew, Matthew 5:32; 19:9 Jesus said these words about the permanence of marriage and the inappropriateness of divorce, but Matthew says Jesus included an exception clause saying that divorce is allowable in the case of adultery. In the passage we are studying in Mark, and in another parallel passage in Luke 16:18, Jesus said these same words about the permanence of marriage but we don't find the exception clause recorded. We don't see Jesus saying divorce is acceptable in the case of adultery. Why does Matthew include the exception clause that permits divorce in the case of adultery, but Mark and Luke, when they quote Jesus, don't include this exception clause?

Remember that according to Leviticus 20:10, adultery in marriage was originally punishable by death not divorce. By the time of the first century, the Romans didn't allow the Jews to carry out the death penalty for adultery. So it was expected you would divorce someone in the case of adultery and treat that person as if he or she was dead.

Mark and Luke don't tell us divorce is acceptable in cases of adultery simply because that was so obvious in that day. If your spouse committed adultery, it was assumed that you would divorce him or her. They were just

thankful someone no longer killed them. Matthew's account of this incident is longer. He included details that for most people in the first century were obvious, that is why they were not explicitly stated in Mark and Luke.

So the schools of Hillel and Shammai were saying you could divorce your spouse if she caused some level of embarrassment to you. Jesus said the only reason you can divorce your wife is if she commits adultery on you.

What about remarriage? Some claim that while Jesus allowed divorce after adultery, Jesus didn't say you could remarry after divorce. In the first century, if you had a right to divorce, you had a right to remarry. They went together. If you did not have a right to divorce, then you didn't have a right to remarry and remarriage was committing adultery against your former spouse.

Jesus said that when your marriage gets hard, when the marriage does not feel like it is fulfilling, or when you meet somebody new and exciting so you think a new spouse would be more fun, don't get divorced. None of those are reasons to get divorced. If you hit the divorce button in marriage difficulties, it may look like an easy thing, but it will always be a devastating thing with long-term consequences for you, your spouse, and your children. Understand that the divorce button is the nuclear option. There will be radioactive fall-out for years after you hit it. Jesus said it is only allowable in the case of the most grievous break of the marital bond, the case of adultery.

Now these are my words, not the Bible's. If adultery takes place in your marriage, I would be very careful about hitting the divorce button and taking the nuclear option. When marriages get difficult, and a spouse begins chatting with

someone of the opposite sex online, which is clearly sin, many people consider this an affair and want a divorce. While chatting with someone of the opposite sex online is a grievous and terrible thing, it is not adultery. Get your hands off the divorce button and work on the marriage. Don't give up on the marriage. If there is a time when a spouse commits an act of adultery but confesses his or her sin and repents of that sin, even though you are terribly hurt and incredibly angry, I would counsel you away from the divorce button. Remember the consequences of going the divorce route are devastating, not just to you, but to your children and for the rest of your life.

Reserve the divorce button for persistent infidelity. Divorce is never what God originally wanted, but he allowed it to limit the consequences of sinful human hearts. Divorce was not allowed to let the adulterous spouse continue an affair. Divorce was allowed to give the faithful spouse a second chance at a life and a future.

At this point, let's widen our lens. What else does the Bible say about divorce? Paul also addressed the topic of divorce.

What did Paul say about divorce?

Paul addressed divorce in 1 Corinthians 7.

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. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. 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. 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. For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? 1 Corinthians 7:12–16 (ESV)

Paul was writing to the church in Corinth where many people became Christians but many had spouses that had not become Christians. Many people were in spiritually mixed marriages.

First, Paul said he gave his words, not Jesus' words. Some people think that means these words from Paul are not authoritative or inspired. That is a misunderstanding. When Paul said, "These are my words, not the Lord's," that means Paul could not quote from Jesus on this topic so instead he addressed the topic of spiritually mixed marriages under his own authority as an apostle inspired by God.

He said in a mixed marriage, where one is a believer and the other isn't a believer, the believer is not to leave his or her unbelieving spouse. The hope is the positive influence of the believer in the marriage will lead the other spouse to Jesus. This is the same with the children. The children of a believer are also influenced toward Christ by the believer being in the home.

If there comes a time when the unbeliever in the marriage insists on leaving, you can let them go. After that, the believer is free to remarry.

So we now see two biblically allowable options for divorce. Jesus allowed divorce in the case of adultery. Paul allowed divorce in a spiritually mixed marriage if the unbeliever insists on leaving the marriage.

Are there other situations when divorce is possible? I would say there are but they are not spelled out in the Bible so we should be very cautious with them. Let me give you an example. I once counseled a couple where both of them claimed to be Christians, but the husband loved to drink. Night after night he

would drink to the point of not remembering what he did by the morning. When he had too much to drink, he became abusive toward his wife and beat his wife. When he sobered up in the morning, she begged him to put away the bottle and she told him what he would do when he drank, but he didn't change. He loved the bottle more than his bride. Eventually she separated from him temporarily out of fear for her life. That temporary separation never changed him. That led to a permanent divorce. While the Bible doesn't directly address that situation, I suspect that if Paul did write about it, he would not want a wife to stay in a marriage where she was beaten and fearing for her life.

No two marital breakdowns are the same. There is no one-size-fits-all answer to marital disintegration. Every broken marriage takes abundant wisdom and humility to navigate the situation and put things back together.

Conclusions

What can we take away from our study?

1. **God created marriage to be a lifelong relationship.** Jesus refused to let divorce be treated casually. God never intended for marriages to be dissolved. Since marriage is so powerful and permanent, divorce is never the easy answer.
2. **There are times when divorce is permitted.** Jesus said divorce is permitted for adultery. Divorce was allowed not to encourage to adulterous spouse but to protect the faithful spouse and give him or her a marital hope and future. Paul also said divorce is acceptable if an unbelieving spouse insists on leaving.

3. **The church's attitude toward divorce must combine truth and grace.**

Today, we learned the truth about divorce. We know two clear reasons it is biblically allowable. Divorce for casual reasons is committing adultery against a former spouse. That is the truth we must know and the truth we must hold to. While we hold to truth, we must also hold to grace. There are plenty of people in the church this morning that may now realize they divorced for the wrong reasons. Right now they may realize they treated divorce too casually. They are realizing they committed adultery against their former spouses. What should they do? What should we do as a church? The answer is simple. The Bible says that if we confess our sin, Jesus is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Right now anyone who confesses their sin to Jesus and asks for forgiveness of sin from Jesus will receive it. Jesus died on the cross to take away the sin of wrong divorce. Jesus died on the cross to take away the sin of adultery. Turn to Jesus, call out to him and ask Jesus' death on the cross to pay for your sin and he will!

Conclusion

The other question is, "As a church, how do we treat people who have sinned by wrongful divorce or the sin of adultery?" The answer from the Bible is clear. Divorce and adultery are not unforgivable sins. When Jesus has forgiven people of their sin, as his people we also forgive people of their sin. Jesus treats them as a new creation. We treat them as a new creation. As God's people, may we be as forgiving of others as Jesus is forgiving of us.



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