

Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

As Jesus conducted His earthly ministry, the Pharisees, who sought to challenge Jesus' teachings and turn the crowds against Him, often confronted Him. In verse 3 of Matthew 19, this goal of the Pharisees is clearly stated as they attempted to corner Jesus in ongoing debate regarding the interpretation of what constitutes grounds for divorce, as discussed in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Instead of engaging the debate regarding the grounds for divorce, Jesus turns His focus to the real meaning behind marriage.

Matthew 19:1-9

1 Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. **2** And large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. **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.” **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. **9** And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”

Here are three important things we learn about Christian marriage:

I. The world's view of marriage is that it is a contract between two parties (vs. 1-3).

The Pharisees wanted to squabble over the wording in Deuteronomy 24 because they only viewed marriage as a contractual arrangement. Each party needed to fulfill his/her side of the “contract” or the contract could be cancelled.

II. God's view of marriage is that it is a covenant that reflects the very character of God (vs. 4-6).

Jesus immediately takes the Pharisees all the way back to Genesis and God's original plan and purpose in marriage. Quoting Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, Jesus reminds His hearers of the covenantal relationship between a man and a woman created by God.

III. In His mercy God provides for our failure in marriage (vs. 7-9).

Though divorce clearly doesn't make sense in a covenantal relationship, because of our “hardness of heart,” the Lord in His mercy “allows” for divorce. According to Scripture the only things that make divorce allowable are sexual infidelity (vs. 9) and desertion (1 Corinthians 7:12-16).

Discussion Questions

1. Why would divorce make sense if marriage is simply seen as a contract?

2. Why is divorce not an option if marriage is meant to be a covenant reflecting the covenant relationship God has with His people?
 3. What are the aspects of Jesus' definition of marriage?
 4. Why would sexual infidelity and desertion be considered as the only allowable grounds for divorce?

Going Deeper

1. What are some ways in which you wrongly view marriage as a contractual relationship between two equally responsible parties?
 2. What are some ways you need to change in order to have your marriage reflect your covenant-keeping God? If you are single, what are some things you need to change in your attitude about marriage in order to reflect your covenant-keeping God?