

**Matthew 5:31-32:** It was also said, "Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce."<sup>32</sup> 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.

**Intro: Matthew 5:20:** For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Last week we heard Jesus warn us that lust is heart adultery. This week He warns us that divorce causes adultery.

**John Stott:** I confess to a basic reluctance to attempt an exposition of these verses. This is partly because divorce is a controversial and complex subject, but even more because it is a subject which touches people's emotions at a deep level. There is almost no unhappiness so [painful] as the unhappiness of an unhappy marriage, and almost no tragedy so great as the degeneration of what God meant for love and fulfillment into a non-relationship of bitterness, discord and despair. Although I believe that God's way in most cases is not divorce, I hope I shall write with sensitivity, for I know the pain that many suffer, and I have no wish to add to their distress. Yet it is because I am convinced that the teaching of Jesus on this and every subject is good: intrinsically good, good for individuals, good for society – that I take my courage in both hands and write on.

### **1. Moses Allowed God's People To Divorce Because Of Their Hardness Of Heart**

**Matt. 5:31-32:** "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' (Deut. 24)

What Moses (God) wrote in Deut. 24 protected women (it allowed remarriage = provision), & it made divorce harder to do. But divorce is always the result of sin and hardness of heart on either the man or woman's part.

**Matt 19:3-10:** Pharisees came up to him & tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?"<sup>4</sup> He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male & female,<sup>5</sup> & said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh?'<sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."<sup>7</sup> They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce & to send her away?"<sup>8</sup> 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."<sup>9</sup> And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, & marries another, commits adultery."<sup>10</sup> The disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry."

The Pharisees used what Moses allowed to find all kinds of loopholes so that divorce was allowed for all kinds of reasons – like no fault divorce today. Jesus is correcting their errors & teaching about the permanence of marriage.

### **2. Jesus, The God-Man, Does Not Allow Divorce**

**Matthew 5:32:** 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.

**a. The applies to both men and women in our day:** Jesus speaks only to the men here possibly because usually only men would be capable of divorcing their wives in Jesus' day, but this applies to both men and women today.

**Mark 10:12:** if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.

**b. "But I say to you"** Jesus is the God-Man Who speaks with all authority!

**c. God created marriage to point the universe to Christ and the Church: Ephesians 5:31-32: (Gen. 2:24)**

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

<sup>32</sup> This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

**d. Jesus forbids divorce: Matthew 5:32:** But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife . . . makes her commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

If you divorce your wife for unlawful reasons, the bond between you still stands in God's sight so that it would be adultery if you are joined in marriage to another person, and it would be adultery for the person who marries the unlawfully divorced person because, again, the marriage bond still stands in God's sight – it's not broken!

### **3. Reasons The Bible Does Allow For Divorce**

**Matthew 5:32:** But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, **except on the ground of sexual immorality**, makes her commit adultery.

**a. Divorce is allowed for certain reasons, but not required:** The Bible gives two grounds or reasons for divorce, but that means divorce is permitted for those reasons and not required! You can still reconcile and stay married!

**b. The first reason the Bible permits divorce is sexual immorality:** If your spouse commits adultery against you, you are permitted to divorce.

**c. The second reason the Bible permits divorce is called abandonment:** If your spouse leaves you and wants nothing more to do with you, you are permitted to divorce.

**1 Corinthians 7:13, 15:** If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, & he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him . . . <sup>15</sup> 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.

**Why does Jesus not mention this exception here?** Jesus goal is not to teach exhaustively on every point and list every caveat and exception: **Matthew 5:22:** everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment

**Matthew 5:22:** whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.

**Matthew 5:28:** everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent

**WCF 24.5:** Adultery or fornication committed after a contract, being detected before marriage, giveth just occasion to the innocent party to dissolve that contract. In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce: and after the divorce, to marry another, as if the offending party were dead.

**WCF 24.6:** Although the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments unduly to put asunder those whom God hath joined together in marriage: yet, nothing but adultery, or such willful desertion as can no way be remedied by the Church, or civil magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage: wherein, a public and orderly course of proceeding is to be observed; and the persons concerned in it not left to their own wills, and discretion, in their own case.

### **4. What Should You Do?**

**a. If you have divorced your spouse for unbiblical reasons:** Repent; confess your sins to God; If possible go back to your divorced spouse and reconcile and be married to them again.

**b. If you have divorced your spouse for unbiblical reasons and there's no possibility of reconciliation:** You are now married to someone else; they are now married to someone else; or they want nothing more to do with you – Repent; confess your sins to God; live in your current marriage the way God has called you to live according to His Word

**c. If you have been divorced by your spouse for biblical grounds:** You have been the one who has sinned and committed adultery, and your spouse rightly and biblically divorced you. Or you have abandoned your spouse. Repent; confess your sins; seek reconciliation if possible; if reconciliation is not possible, be content in the Lord, remarriage is only permitted if reconciliation with your former spouse is impossible.

**d. If you have been divorced by your spouse for unbiblical grounds:** Seek reconciliation; If reconciliation is not possible, it may be a case of abandonment in which you are free to remarry.

**e. If you have divorced your spouse for biblical grounds:** If your spouse has committed adultery against you or abandoned you, then you are free to remarry.

**Sinclair Ferguson:** Jesus recognizes that Scripture itself taught that sexual immorality can destroy marriage bonds. In the Old Testament, sexual sin was regulated by the death penalty setting the other partner free from the marriage. Although that penalty is no longer used, its effect is still relevant. In view of this Old Testament background, in which the marriage ceased to be, so in the New Testament era, someone who is divorced following such marital infidelity can act as though the other partner has ceased to be, and can remarry.

**f. Before you do anything, seek the counsel and advise of the elders of your church where you are a member to whom God calls you to submit and obey: Hebrews 13:17:** Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. **(Man came from another church - seeking divorce.)**

**g. If you are married:** Know that God hates divorce; pursue a deep close relationship with God and with your spouse; take whatever measures necessary to strengthen and grow in your marriage and glorify God.

**h. If you are single:** Realize God's high standard for marriage; **Sam Allberry:** When Jesus taught on marriage, His disciples response was: "No one should ever do this!"

**Matthew 19:10:** The disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry."

Marry only a believer & follower of Jesus Christ Who has the same high view of marriage that Jesus does!

**i. Remember God loves us – an unfaithful, adulterous people: Hosea 1:2:** When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, "Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD."

**Hosea 3:1-3:** The LORD said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another & is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods & love the sacred raisin cakes." <sup>2</sup> So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver & about a homer & a lethek of barley. <sup>3</sup> Then I told her, "You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, & I will live with you."

**Hosea 2:16-20:** "In that day," declares the LORD, "you will call me 'my husband'; you will no longer call me 'my master.' <sup>17</sup> I will remove the names of the Baals from her lips; no longer will their names be invoked. <sup>18</sup> In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures that move along the ground. Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety. <sup>19</sup> I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. <sup>20</sup> I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the LORD.

**Hosea 14:4:** I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them.

**GOSPEL!**

**Neufeld:** The strongest consolation for our reader, struggling to grasp and enact the high level of commitment Jesus required, will arise from Jesus' response to the failure of the disciples. They failed to understand. They received Jesus' strong rebuke in [Mark] 8:14-21, where he openly suspects them of hard hearts, unperceiving eyes, and stopped ears. They lacked faith. They responded to Jesus' second and third death predictions with remarkable insensitivity: by competing with each other for glory and spiritual honors. Jesus' steady loyalty to his disciples in return will encourage our reader. In Mark 14, the disciples failed completely in the very self-denying obedience that Jesus made essential for eternal life in [Mark] 8:34-38 and 13:9-13, for in Mark 14 Peter denied Jesus, and the rest abandoned Jesus, all in order to save their own lives. Yet throughout this increasing failure by the disciples, Jesus remained faithful to them.

Christ Will Never Divorce His Bride  
He Loved And Served And For Her Died  
Then Rose Ensuring She'd Abide  
In Him Forever By His Side  
So When We Marry He's Our Guide  
By Faith Alone We're Justified  
And Selfish Pride Is Mortified  
So Husbands Never Leave Your Bride  
And Wives Be Faithful Don't Divide  
In This The Christ Is Glorified  
His Name Be Praised By All Worldwide!