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## **The Drama of Marriage — Divorce & Remarriage**

### **Selected Passages**

**PowerPoint Presentation: None**

**Keywords: Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, Luke 16:18, Mark 10:1-12, Matthew 5:31-32.**

**SermonAudio blurb:**

#### **I. Introduction.**

- A. The Scripture portrays marriage as a good thing and one to be guarded and treasured.
- B. The Scripture also portrays the influence of sin in marriage resulting in many wrong and evil activities taking place.
  - 1. The ideal of the Bible is one where a man and woman marry and remain faithfully and monogamously married until death.
  - 2. The reality is far short of that both in the bible and in our culture today.
- C. In the Old Testament:
  - 1. The ideal is established in Genesis 2:24, “For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.”
  - 2. From that point there are just a few passages referring to divorce and most of them are not even didactic in nature.
  - 3. At the end of the Old Testament, after 100's of years of sin and rebellion God makes this declaration as He states in Malachi 2:16, “I hate divorce.”
- D. In the New Testament:
  - 1. It can be surprising to find that divorce and remarriage is not a dominant theme any more than in the Old Testament.
  - 2. Jesus deals with the subject in two situations and Paul deals with it briefly in two other situations.
- E. Initial conclusion:
  - 1. It should be a relatively easy subject to address because there are only a few passages to consider.
  - 2. The reality is that it is a hard subject to address.

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3. The causes for this difficulty:
  - a. The emotional reality because divorce creates great hurt and baggage such as bitterness and even guilt.
  - b. Lack of serious study on the subject by many who teach on it and a lack of diligence from those who listen to serious teaching on it.
  - c. Competing views which allow for ease of picking whichever best suits a person's personal conviction or situation.

## F. My goals:

1. To give a fair statement of the various views on this subject.
2. To give a clear exposition from the biblical text regarding this subject.
3. To give a clear statement of my position, based on that exposition, regarding divorce and remarriage.
4. Finally, to give a gracious answer to those who might disagree.

## G. Views Regarding Divorce and Remarriage.

1. Prior to the 16th century the nearly unanimous view was that though there was the ability to divorce due to sexual sin there was no permission to remarry.
2. Since that time there arose a new position that is very common today. It is often called the Erasmian Position.
  - a. Erasmus was a Reformer in the 16th century.
  - b. He likely was the culprit who altered a handwritten Greek manuscript to include a key addition of a word in Matthew 19 that allows for an exception to divorce and remarriage.
  - c. Unfortunately, that addition finds itself into many of our translations today.
3. Today I want us to begin to look at some of the key passages related to this difficult subject.

## II. Key texts:

### A. Luke 16:18.

1. This is an incredibly absolute passage that cannot just be passed over lightly.

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2. It is interesting for me to note that when divorce and remarriage is discussed in many circles you would think that the only passages that exist are in Matthew 5 and 19. What seems to go ignored are the other very clear passages that exist for our study.
3. Points of observation:
  - a. First of all understand that the Jewish culture of that time had divorce as a common activity.
    - (1) Two main schools of thought existed and they debated the meaning of the Old Testament text in Deuteronomy 24:1 “When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that 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 from his house. . . .”
    - (2) Rabbi Shammai was very conservative and strict. He understood the Old Testament to teach that divorce could only occur for a very serious sin, one of sexual misconduct.
    - (3) Rabbi Hillel was very liberal in his view. He saw that a man could divorce his wife for essentially anything.
    - (4) We will see this later on in this study, but these two schools of thought are what was driving the question to Jesus in Matthew 19:3, “And some Pharisees came to Him, testing Him, and saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all?"”
    - (5) The result of all this is that divorce was quite common in the days of Jesus.
  - b. Second, Jesus is confronting head on the culture of His day that was making divorce so common. In this sense it fits very easily into our present-day culture in America.
  - c. Third, in very straightforward terms and with no exceptions, Jesus says that a man is an adulterer if he divorces his wife and marries another woman.
    - (1) Why?

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- (2) There is only one way, because that first marriage is still present and in force in the eyes of God, regardless of the law of the land.
  - (3) If he had married the second woman, without divorcing the first, then he would have been a bigamist, because he was properly married to both of them.
  - (4) But to divorce one and then go to marry a second woman simply put him into the category of adultery.
  - (5) Now realize the power of these words! Adultery was punishable by death, not something to joke about or speak vaguely.
  - (6) Please grasp that point. Jesus is fully aware of the impact of His words and He is not trying to create confusion but bring stark clarity to this subject.
- d. Fourth, notice in the second half of the verse that if a man (even if this is his first marriage) marries a divorced woman then he will become an adulterer as well.
- e. Fifth, notice the context of this saying by Jesus.
- (1) Verse 13, no one can serve God and money.
  - (2) Verse 14, the Pharisees turn on Him for His teaching.
  - (3) Verse 15, the Lord turns on them now.
    - (a) They are the type of person who is religious but seeks to be justified before men rather than God. . . they are man-pleasers.
    - (b) God knows their heart, even though people can't and have been led astray.
    - (c) Their teaching, though popular, is a detestable thing. Literally, something that is hated and abhorred by God.
  - (4) Verse 16-17 Jesus emphasizes the permanency of the Word of God, specifically God's law.
  - (5) Now, think about this for a moment, there is a detestable teaching going on through the Pharisees. It was popular

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with people but not God. The Word of God was not something to be set aside or reinterpreted. . . .

- (6) So guess what Jesus then speaks to immediately after this? Divorce and remarriage. And He attacks it head on and with very, very clear language.

B. Mark 10:1-12.

1. Here we have some of the Pharisees testing Jesus and they bring up this point of controversy—at least to them.
  - a. Remember what I said about the two schools of thought.
  - b. For the Pharisees, this was going to be a fun, intellectual time where they get Jesus to land on one side or the other.
  - c. But again, He doesn't land on either of their positions—thus leaving them all with a very bitter taste in their mouths.
2. Verse 1, Jesus is teaching again among the crowds of people.
3. Verse 2, the Pharisees come seeking to test him.
  - a. Notice that it is a question of the law. What is lawful?
  - b. But they phrase it in such a way as to leave a lot of room for Christ to say something that they can seize upon.
  - c. If they were honest they would have said, “Hey Jesus, we have a debate that has been going on for quite some time. Some of us see divorce as a very restricted act, while others a very broad and easy act. Where do you land on this issue?”
  - d. But our Lord simply takes it all in stride and asks them, “what is in the bible?”
    - (1) Remember that, before you give an answer, ask the person what the bible says. Then you can find out if they don't know or if they are trying to trick you.
    - (2) Their answer shows that they knew that the Old Testament law allowed for the divorce. So their question was a loaded one, not one of innocence.
  - e. The passage they refer to is Deuteronomy 24. We will not go there right now, we will deal with it a little later. Right now let's just content ourselves to see what our Lord says in response to verse 4.

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4. Verse 5, the Lord now makes comment on the “why” of the command in Deuteronomy 24. It is not a positive command from the Lord but a permission due to their hard hearts.
  - a. Notice that He terms it in the present..... “your heart hearts. . . .”
  - b. And then, immediately He brushes it aside. And this beloved, is so important to notice.
  - c. He doesn’t get into a long discussion on what exactly is written in Deuteronomy. Why?
  - d. Because it is not important in all reality. It is not a declaration of what God’s will and desire is for marriage. Hence the “but” in verse 6.
  - e. To understand God’s will you have to go where Jesus goes, to the garden and the creation of man.
5. So vs 6-8 define for Jesus the purpose and expectations of God toward married persons.
  - a. God made the marriage, one that is between a male and a female.
  - b. And that union is so intimate, so close, that there are no longer two people but one. This point is critical to note.
6. And it is on this point of union that Jesus makes His own divine commentary and application in verse 9.
  - a. Notice that He then just leaves it hanging with the Pharisees.
  - b. They needed to think about this, because they were so busy trying to figure out how a person could divorce that they failed to realize that they were approaching it completely wrong.
  - c. Yet we can see this same attitude today as well. People who are not seeking to ask how to stay in the marriage or what the Lord commands and intends. Rather, there is a scramble on how to get out.
  - d. For Jesus, man has no right, “no man,” to split what is a union of God’s.
7. A later talk to the disciples (10-12).
  - a. This created a lot of questions in the disciples’ minds. Most likely they had not thought about it from this perspective.

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- b. Now we get into the meat of Jesus's meaning in verses 5-9.
  - c. Three points come out in verses 11-12.
    - (1) If a man divorces his wife and marries another, he is committing adultery against his wife.
    - (2) A woman who divorces her husband and remarries commits adultery.
    - (3) Jesus treats both males and females the same insofar as marriage and divorce. This is unique in their society, where it was focused mostly upon the man.
  - d. Now listen beloved, and listen real careful.
    - (1) What is adultery? It is being sexually unfaithful to your spouse. Right?
    - (2) Now, can you commit adultery if you just live with a person? No.
    - (3) If a homosexual cheats on his partner, is he committing adultery? No.
    - (4) Why? Because in these two scenarios, there is no marriage.
    - (5) But. . . Jesus says in verse 11, “. . . Whoever . . . what? [divorces] his wife. . .”
      - (a) Stop right there.
      - (b) He says that the couple are divorced right?
      - (c) Now, in our way of thinking that means they are not married, right?
      - (d) But not in God's eyes, because if this man marries another, then he is committing adultery. That is impossible if they are not married. Do you see that point?
      - (e) The same goes for the wife as it did for the husband.
8. It is here that we see a more full understanding of exactly how serious Jesus was when He said, “. . . let no man pull asunder.”
- C. Matthew 5:31-32.

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1. As we turn to the book of Matthew we come to the two key passages that create the division that exists on this doctrine of divorce and remarriage.
  - a. Good men land on various sides and therefore we need to take this slow and listen carefully.
  - b. As usual, whenever there is controversy, the need is careful study. That means that it can get hard and deep at times, though my job is to make it accessible.
2. Both this passage and Matthew 19:3-9 are very similar to one another, obviously spoken by Christ and written by Matthew. Therefore, in an effort to get to Matthew 19, I will only deal with those things in Matthew 5 that are unique to it.
3. This teaching by Christ is part of the Sermon on the Mount.
  - a. Part of this is showing Christ's uniqueness in approaching the Word of God and how He teaches it.
  - b. Matthew 7:28-29 The result was that when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were amazed at His teaching; 29 for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.
    - (1) They were used to vagueness and perspectives and options about what God was saying in and through the bible.
    - (2) But when Christ spoke, there was a no nonsense, straightforward manner about it. There was a clear sense that what was said was true and therefore authoritative in all their lives.
  - c. When looking at the Sermon on The Mount there are various ways that people will approach it.
    - (1) Time does not permit me to get into the many, many views.
    - (2) But let me give you a sense of how to approach chapters 5-7 by looking at verses 17-20. The key is verse 20.
    - (3) There was a serious problem with the scribes and Pharisees, they approached God's law and God's word from only one dimension—external.
    - (4) This is why Christ so often brings an internal aspect to His comments, such as hating a brother as being guilty of

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murder, or lusting in your heart toward a woman as committing adultery.

- (5) In other words, motive is as important as action.
  - (a) Example is 6:1ff, note that much of what they do is not bad in itself—it is bad because of its motive.
  - (b) The Pharisees were experts and discussing the fine points of the law and yet missing the whole point of the law. (Matthew 23:23 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. )
- (6) The end result of this is Jesus’s radical call for us to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect (5:48).
  - (a) He is not calling us to sinlessness.
  - (b) Rather, He is calling us to have the right standard. And that standard is not the external one the Pharisees were telling them to follow.

d. All of this is important to keep in mind as you look at His treatment on divorce and remarriage.

- 4. First, notice the reference to Deut. 24 ("Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce"). (Notice that “let him give” is a command).
  - a. Now, listen to the actual passage from Deuteronomy 24:1-4  
"When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that 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 from his house, 2 and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's wife, 3 and if the latter husband turns against 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 husband dies who took her to be his wife, 4 then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD."

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- b. Now hear this well. Don't miss it. These two quotes don't match up. Why?
    - (1) Nowhere is there a command to give a certificate of divorce in this passage.
    - (2) In fact, it is not even a passage talking about how or when you get to divorce. Rather it is speaking of what are some consequences if you divorce your wife.
    - (3) So what is the point? It is this, that Jesus is purposely not quoting the Old Testament passage, rather, He is giving a summary of how the Pharisees had reworked Deut to make it a command allowing for divorce.
    - (4) Another example of this is 5:43, no where in the Old Testament was "hate your enemy" found. This was a Pharisaical and Scribal add-on. A subtraction is that the actual Old Testament command is to love your neighbor as yourself.
  - c. And the listeners would have heard Jesus and nodded, "Yep, that is what we have heard alright." And then He over and over disassembles those faulty statements or applications.
  - d. And that is what He is doing with divorce and remarriage.
5. What is Jesus saying then? Well, first, He is saying that those coveted certificates of divorce are worthless in the sight of God.
- a. Without worrying about the "except" statement right now, we see that all you are doing when you divorce your wife is making her commit adultery and making the one who marries her commit adultery.
  - b. That is simply another way of saying that those husbands who sent away their wives with a certificate of divorce were really still married to them. There was no dissolution of marriage, no matter what the courts of the land said.
  - c. One man said it this way, "Where the Jewish [customary] law went wrong was in the failure to perceive that the one flesh persisted after divorce." (Derrett, quoted in D'Amour, p. 134).
  - d. Beloved, you need to carefully think about what I just showed you. We cannot hide behind the law of the land, we are believers and our law is a different one.

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6. Secondly, notice one other stunning point in Christ's words here.
  - a. He is not saying that if you divorce and remarry that you commit adultery.
  - b. He is saying that when you divorce your wife, you are making her commit adultery.
  - c. In other words, the husband is being held responsible and blameable for her actions.
  - d. The reason for this is two-fold.
    - (1) First, because of the headship of the husband. He is the one sending away his wife instead of protecting her and loving her. Therefore, her sins become his sins.
    - (2) Second, the wife in those days especially, was unprotected if she were divorced. Therefore, she would naturally seek out another man to marry so as to be cared for.
    - (3) One man said it well here, "What a statement! One can cause adultery by following the 'laws of the land,' and even without personally having extra-marital intercourse! A divorce was all it took to be responsible for the sin of adultery. Jesus was clearly educating and calling the people to a marriage standard higher than the highest in the land!" (D'Amour, p. 136)
7. Now we will not deal with the exception statement here because it is found in the Matthew 19 passage as well but that is for next week.

### **III. Conclusion.**

- A. I recognize the emotional aspect of this whole subject. The great temptation for myself is to simply bypass the whole thing and move on.
- B. However, to do that is to become guilty of the very point I often make regarding the state of so many churches today. A light, topical preaching that never really points people to what the Bible says nor what Christ expects of those who follow Him.
- C. What you need to take home with you today.
  1. First, if you don't have these notes, download them and print them out.

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2. Second, if you are troubled, try to figure out where and what troubles you. For myself, it was as I began to get a nasty feeling that I had never studied this to any real depth and what I was finding did not sit with me well.
3. Third, for those who are part of our Community Groups, it would be good to give any questions that arise to your group leader and have them communicate those to me.
4. Fourth, be very careful to not jump to conclusions at this point. Let what we looked at today just sit in your mind and think on it. Also be careful to not speak on my behalf to others. Rather encourage them to hear the sermon.
5. Fifth, never forget the gospel. It is in Jesus Christ that we are redeemed from our sin. Sin that is willfully done and sin that is done in simple ignorance. More importantly, we are rescued from the power of sin itself.

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#### Community Group Questions

- **This is the first sermon so it is important for all involved to not make conclusions yet. Caution the group to make observations from the sermon but shy away from hard conclusions. It is best for the groups to talk about what stood out in the message. What questions are raised in the minds of the people (please CGLs write down key questions to give to me, I plan on addressing them in a sermon).**
- **One question that is worthy of talking through if possible is how a strong understanding of the sanctity of marriage connects to the gospel.**