

# “When is it OK to Divorce and Remarry?” Matthew 19:3–9 //

## *From the Beginning, #4*

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We’re in week 4 in our *From the Beginning* series... Whenever Jesus was asked a tough question about marriage or sex or relationships, he based his answer on what God had established “from the beginning.”

- The first week, we looked at how God designed sex;
- The second, we looked at what God’s plan is for us when we are single (did he design us to be married, so that is a perfected state)?
- Last week, we looked at what the Bible says about same sex attraction;
- This week we are going to look at how to get through difficulty in marriage, and what to do after divorce; basically what the Bible says about divorce.

I have to admit, when I sat down this past week to start working on this message, I couldn’t believe how relieved I felt to be working on a sermon on divorce... but after the stress of delivering the message on SSA last week, talking about divorce feels like a walk in the park. One of our pastors said “After the heaviness of last week, maybe you should just walk on stage this week with a bunch of puppies...” (J.D. with puppies)

Divorce has affected a lot of people in our church. Some of you have gone through it yourself; some of you are going through it right now; for many of you, you watched your parents go through it.

I want you to know I don’t come judgmentally on this. I know that for many of you it was one of the most painful times in your life and something that if you could have avoided, you would have.

Some Christians talk about it like it is the unforgivable sin... As if it is the one thing you can’t ever really come back from... the scarlet D you carry with you for the rest of your life... **But that’s a lie.** I’m going to show you that today.

And while not everyone is divorced, we all have brokenness in our families. Probably **the only thing we all have in common** in relation to our families is conflict, hurtful conflict... (And learning to press through that and keep the family in tact is one of the most essential skills in family).

This is the thing we try to prepare you for in pre-marital counseling but it never works... people come into marriage with totally different ways of going into conflict and they can’t understand each other...

- Some of you are **peacemakers** (you just want to get past the conflict, so you’ll say anything to smooth it over)
- **The stuffer** (crams all the anger down... “Is everything ok?” Yes! I’m fine? Are you sure? “I said I’m fine!”)
- Then you have **the sulker**: You don’t fight back; you just sulk around and try to subtly hint about what is bothering you.
- *Some of you are the litigator* (You are a **good arguer**, and you want to **spouse to see** that you are never wrong. It’s **not that we can’t admit** we’re wrong, we just feel like we are legitimately never wrong. (Did I just slip into the **1<sup>st</sup> person** pronoun there?).
- **The screamer**. Self-explanatory.<sup>1</sup>
- **Here’s the thing: One of the rules of the universe seems to be that you never marry someone who does conflict in the same way... Some of you were peacemakers or stuffers, and you married a screamer**, and in your first argument in marriage you wanted to say “Demons, come out!”
- When Veronica and I were in premarital counseling... the one session we ran out of time for was “conflict resolution.” We

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<sup>1</sup> Terms on list from Andy Stanley’s, “Conflict in the Family.”

thought, “It’s ok, we never really fight.” That was a strategic oversight.

**Why do premarital counseling before marriage?** (Diff in how you listen!)

**Conflict is inevitable** in marriage... and for many people **it destroys** their marriage **but God intended it** to make you more like him (to love him) and even to draw you closer to your spouse.

So learning to think about this the right way is crucial... But **first let’s start** by looking at what Jesus taught on divorce. **Matthew 19:3–9.**

**Warning:** It’s pretty heavy, so get ready:

### Matthew 19:3–9 ESV

[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,** (See what he did? He went back to the beginning... that’s our series title) [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.” (so, ‘No;’ Jesus had taken the bait).

[7] They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?”

- And it was true... Moses had said in **Deut 24:1** “When a man takes a wife and marries her, if he finds some indecency in her,” he could divorce her.
- So they are like, “Well, Jesus, you are saying we shouldn’t get divorced, but Moses said we could. GOTCHA!”
- (For the record, you should never get in a battle of wits with Jesus. Particularly over the Bible.
  - **Bible Quiz App.** I go into these things pretty confidently. PhD. I’ve gotten matched up with this guy that beats me

every time. Idaho. Am I playing an angel? “**Angel unawares.**” Maybe God has appointed this angel to humble me because I lose to this person every single time... “So, if you are listening to this podcast, hats off to you, *ThiefintheNight4212.*” And no, I don’t play under my real name, either, so don’t look for me if you have this app, because if one of y’all beats me I don’t want you to know it. OK, I’ll tell you my screen name: It’s “*GunsandMoses.*”

- Anyway, that’s how the Pharisees felt when they Bible-spurred with Jesus. He always won.

[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.**”

- Rabbis at the time taught a difference between a command in the law and a concession...
  - A command expressed God’s heart... it showed what God desired from beginning
  - A concession was something God allowed because of man’s fallen condition, in order to keep peace in a society filled with people at various levels of spiritual maturity.
- This allowance for divorce, Jesus said, was not a command; it was a concession due to our fallen state.

The **Pharisees actually knew** that... many of the Rabbis at the time taught the **difference in command and concessions** in the law. But here was their trap: What did Moses mean by ‘**something indecent**’? **Moses had said**... what **qualified for**...? (*Erwat dabar* was unclear, even for people who spoke Hebrew.)

There were two dominant schools of thought:

- **Rabbi Shammai**... He said that indecent meant only ‘*sexual indecency*,’ meaning that Moses was saying that if a man discovered his wife had been sexually unfaithful, he could divorce her. **Conservative.**

- On the other side you had **Rabbi Hillel** (he was the progressive... lived in Chapel Hill). Hillel said “indecent” meant *anything* you didn’t like about her. Maybe she has **indecent behavior... or indecent cooking skills, or indecent morning breath...** I’m actually **not joking** about this... We have record of him saying, ‘If she consistently burns the bread, *erwat dabar*, you may divorce her.’” Hillel said, “If you fall out of love with her, *erwat dabar*, divorce her. If you fall in love with someone else, *erwat dabar*, divorce her.”<sup>2</sup>

And here’s the thing: **The majority of the Jewish world** was on the side of Rabbi Hillel. So the Pharisees are trying to get Jesus on record saying something that would make him unpopular.

Furthermore, **John the Baptist had just been imprisoned** and executed for speaking out against casual divorce and remarriage. And the Pharisees thought, “*Maybe if we can get Jesus to stand up against divorce like John the Baptist did, we can get him killed, too.*”<sup>3</sup>

So, what is Jesus’ answer? [9] *And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.*”

Jesus actually goes stronger than the conservative position.

**The basis of his answer** is how God had established from the beginning.

Marriage, he says, was a relationship in which God **fuses two lives** into one. The two become one flesh. As I’ve explained, your finances become one; your bodies and emotions become one in sex; your

families and your futures become one. (More than a **contract**; **companionship**; or an ideal setting for **procreation**)

God designed it to **demonstrate the Trinity, Paul says**, Distinct persons, one essence.

That kind of unity cannot just be walked away from, Jesus and Paul would say. It’s **not a contract** where you negotiate terms and have a buy-out option. It’s a **fusion of their life into your life** that makes a **new entity**.

So, [6] *What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.*” No comma. No dash. No asterisk. No fine print. No recommended reading. Period. End of Sentence.

There were two visions of marriage in Jesus’ day, just like there are two today:

### Consumer and covenant

- **A consumer** relationship is one where you figure out what you need and who best can meet that need.
  - There is **nothing wrong with consumer** relationships: I have a consumer relationship with my grocery store—I go because it is convenient to my house; it has fairly good prices and a RedBox if I want a movie...
  - However, **if I find one that is more convenient**, or has better prices, I go there. That is a consumer relationship, and there’s nothing wrong with that.
- **I can’t have that kind of relationship** with my kid. I don’t go to them and say, “You know, Ryah, this is just not working out. It’s not you; it’s me. I actually have been hanging out with the neighbor’s kids, and I’m happier with them.”
- **Nobody would do that because your relationship with your kids is not a consumer relationship.**
- **Question:** What kind of relationship is sex and marriage?
  - If you’re sleeping with someone

<sup>2</sup> D.A. Carson, *Matthew*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, p. 411.

<sup>3</sup> I was helped in the development of the flow of thought here by John Mark Comer, “Divorce,” Mark 10:1–12

- If you get divorced because it is just not working...
- **According to Jesus**, marriage is a (*say it*) covenant.

### So is it ever ok to divorce?

- *Jesus says that divorce should not therefore be an option except in the case of adultery. **Why would that be an exception?***
- The logic of this is very important. **Adultery kills the covenant.** When someone unites themselves to another person sexually, they have destroyed the covenant with you.
- (This is the **same reason you are free to remarry** if your spouse dies. Your **covenant with them is dead** because they are dead. Adultery kills the covenant which makes divorce a legitimate option.)
- **You say, is that the only exception?** Well, Paul in 1 Cor 7 seems to use the same logic... notice the logic... **1 Co7:10 To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord):** (Paul is saying, “Jesus taught this, not me,” referring back to Matthew 19) **the wife should not separate from her husband “Separate” = (chorizo) vernacular for “divorce.” 11 (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife. [13] If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him.**
  - Here was the situation in Corinth: The Corinthian church was filled with new believers, and some of their spouses **didn’t understand** their new faith... wouldn’t come to church with them, **mocked them**... and so, not surprisingly, some of them thought, “This would just be **easier if we weren’t married**... he’s dragging me down. *Surely God would not want me to be in a home where I get no spiritual support. He wants me to be with someone who will encourage me, spiritually. So, for spiritual reasons, I should divorce.*”
  - Paul says, **“No... Even if you think is better for you spiritually to separate, you should stay married, because marriage is a union, a covenant relationship, not a contract you can walk away from or a consumer relationship where you choose**

someone that better meets your needs. Marriage is a **fundamentally different type** of relationship: a **covenant**.

- Plus, Paul says, God has you in the unbeliever’s life for a reason: Why? <sup>14</sup> **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.**
  - *Meaning?*
  - Stay married, he says, for the sake of the children and the spouse. They are “sanctified” through you. They get to see you live out the gospel up close.
  - A **guy once told me that the only Christian** in his family was the grandmother—not the grandfathers, aunts, uncles... Now all the grandchildren are believers
  - **Maybe that’s you.** And maybe it’s **not really fulfilling** for you. But life, Paul says, is not about you: Jesus did not die on the cross as an act of self-fulfillment; he did it so save us. That’s how you should live in your marriage, too.

**1 Co7:15 But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved.** (“Bound.” Not bound means free to remarry).<sup>4</sup> Why? Because **God has called you to peace.** What that means is that if the one who is an unbeliever says, “I can’t take this,” and leaves, you are no longer bound to the marriage, because they have killed the covenant.

*(You see, it’s the same logic Jesus used. The covenant stands until it has been killed. When it has been killed, you are free.)*

Some people say, “What if there is technically not adultery or the departure of an unbeliever, but one spouse is abusive, or they are involved in illegal activity they won’t stop that is putting your family in danger?”

<sup>4</sup> J. MacArthur, *1 Corinthians*, 167.

Well, you should definitely get yourself out of the situation immediately. **As far as divorce, many Bible scholars say that the logic of Paul and Jesus' statements here may allow for divorce when a spouse has killed the covenant** by getting to a place where they are **unable to be lived** with... you and your kids are in danger because of it.

- (This doesn't mean they've gotten annoying, or "they've changed," or "they are just not doing it for me," but that they have killed the covenant through adultery or abuse.)
- You **need to do this under close advisement** of a Christian counselor, and the pastors of your church.
- A space of separation may be in order, even a long one, to give the one spouse space to repent. If they refuse to, after a long period of time, **they may have, in effect**, "left the marriage" and so, 1 Cor 7:15, you are no longer bound.
- Again, this is something you should only do in close consultation with your pastors and spiritual leader.

**But the big point I want you to get is this: from the beginning, God established marriage as a covenant, not in any way as a consumer relationship... TWO BECOME ONE.** Divorce should be as radical as AMPUTATING an arm of a leg. (There are times when amputation is necessary, but any doctor would be run out of the practice if he was constantly and quickly saying, "Let's just amputate it." 'Hang nail? Amputation. Sprained ankle. Ugly freckles or varicose veins? Cut if off!' Amputation is **the last thing** that you do!<sup>5</sup>)

So, using the time I have left, let me deal with three practical questions: 1. How do I stay in a difficult marriage? 2. If I'm divorced, should I get remarried? 3. If I am divorced and remarried, how does God see me?

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<sup>5</sup> Tim Keller, "Marriage, Divorce, & Singleness," Genesis 2; Matthew 19:3-12

## 1. How do I stay in a difficult marriage?

- A. **First of all, reject the right person myth.** Remember this from our 2<sup>nd</sup> week?
- The right person myth says ***that there is a right person out there for you, and good marriage is determined by finding that person and if you don't find that person, you'll never be happy... and that if you're unhappy in marriage it's because you haven't found that special someone...*** (at first you thought...; right person)
  - You always marry the wrong person... **because you are a sinner** and they are a sinner and they are not God... **plus, you change!**
  - ***The best you can hope for in marriage is "less of a bad match" for you, since everyone ends up being a bad match.***
  - ***God's purpose in marriage is not to restore the missing part of your soul... but to teach you to become like him: to love an annoying sinner... like you***
    - ***G. Thomas: God's main purpose in marriage is not to make you happy by uniting with a perfect person, but holy by teaching you to love like him.***
    - ***To note, I'm not saying you can't genuinely be in love with your spouse (I so love Veronica!); just don't look for in marriage something it was never designed to give you!***
  - Marrying someone new won't fix your emptiness. Wont' fix your problems.
  - Reject it...

## B. Do it for Jesus

- The **covenant we made** was first and foremost to him.
- Me and V: Picture him behind your spouse. They may not be worthy of forgiveness, or sacrifice, or even my love... but he is.
- **We don't get divorced because we fall out of love with our spouse, but because we don't take seriously our obedience to Jesus.**

## C. Soak yourself in God's grace

- What precedes this: teaching on forgiveness (Matthew 18:22: 70x7!) 7's were infinite.

- Then story of talents (20 yrs wages)
  - You are person who owes 10 K
  - Nothing anyone has done that comes close to what you've done.
- Did you see in Matthew 19 why Moses in Israel's civil law had allowed the provision on divorce? **"Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so."**
  - Ultimately it is our hardened hearts that kills a marriage. It is not the sex, the fights, etc. It is the hardened heart. Jesus' sacrifice and the power of the Holy Spirit can change your heart.<sup>6</sup>

#### D. Do it for others

- 1 Cor 7... Paul recognizes benefits to others
- You probably don't need me to cite the stats about the devastation divorce has on kids. One marriage author I was reading said, "Absolutely, you should stay married for your kids."
- **Children of divorce are four times** more likely to have social problems. **Two times** more likely to drop out of school. Three times more likely to need psychological help; five times more likely to be unable to keep a job.<sup>7</sup>
- The other thing we have to consider, as believers, is what a divorce tells our kids (and our community) about the love of God. When we walk away from a marriage because we are unhappy, **we tell them that God's love is conditional...** that **when we annoy him or disappoint him** or make him unhappy, he leaves us.
- The **world desperately needs to know** the patient, steadfast, never-giving up love of God, and our marriages are supposed to demonstrate that!

<sup>6</sup> John Mark Comer, "Divorce," Mark 10.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.children-and-divorce.com/children-divorce-statistics.html>; <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2411830/What-divorce-really-does-children--shattering-words-if-youre-divorced-thinking-testimony-shake-core.html>

- I don't mean to make this devastating... **the healing power of God's grace is amazing...** and I know divorced people in this church that are experiencing God's incredible sustaining grace besides these disadvantages... **I'll get to that more at the end.**
- But the fact that God's grace is amazing shouldn't cause us to take lightly the damaging power of sin, and that's what I'm trying to do in pointing this out.

#### E. Get some counseling

- (Brad's seminars: summitrdu.com)
- (Me and Veronica)

#### 2. Should I get remarried?

- **When a divorce is legitimate, remarriage is an option.** But realize that just because you **can** get remarried doesn't mean you **should**
- Paul says in 1 Cor 7 Paul that **singleness can be a gift...** you don't need marriage to be happy... it may be better for you and your kids for you to stay single or God may have purposes for you in a time of singleness...
- Jesus actually talks about this in this **Matthew 19** passage: [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."**
  - A eunuch is... ask your campus pastor.
  - A man with no sexual desire. Can't get married. A metaphor for 3 kinds of single people; physically incapable to be married (or those to whom God gives no desire for the opposite sex); others made that way through injustice (divorced); others who choose it for a season (to do something in the kingdom).
  - In all cases, God enables.
- But, if after you have been divorced, you think remarriage is a gift God is bringing back to you... here are some questions:
  - **Have I given God time to restore my previous marriage?**

- It amazes me the speed people move through this... They seem not to realize how much is at stake! It's like amputation; it hurts everyone involved.
- **Even if you are separated or divorced**, you ought to ask God to heal your previous marriage, and give him time to do it.
  - **BTW, nothing says if your spouse committed adultery** that God can't enable you to forgive. **Some of the best marriages** I know today had that in their past... and God enabled the hurt spouse to show grace and their marriage today is stronger for it!
    - Take time... 1 full year after the divorce is final
- ***Lastly, have I given God time to heal me?***
  - Counseling... Divorce Care or what we offer here.

### 3. If I am divorced and remarried, how does God see me?

I'll say what I said at the beginning: **Divorce is not the unforgivable sin.** Look at: **Jeremiah 3:8.** God says, **"For all her adulteries, I gave faithless Israel a certificate of divorce."**

- God has the audacity to call himself a divorced person! If I were to ask all divorced people to stand up, and God where here, he'd stand up.

Now, of course, there was no sin on his side of the divorce, and maybe there was on yours. *In the cross and resurrection, Jesus puts away the sin done by you and he overturns the sin done to you.*

- The cross: "He bore our sins in his own body on the cross," and when we believe he died for us, God transfers our sin to Jesus and imputes to us Jesus' righteousness. 1 John 1:9
- The resurrection is God overturning the curse of death and destruction brought on by our sin, whether our sin or somebody else's, and infusing the power of new life into the dead tomb of a

broken relationship. **The empty tomb is the answer for a soul broken by divorce.**

**Maybe you made terrible** mistakes in that process; even committed terrible sins. You **can't change that now**, and those **mistakes don't mean God is done** with you.

**Think of David and Bathsheba.** That relationship started under the WORST of circumstances. David had **an affair** with a married woman, and then had her husband murdered. **Yet when he confessed and repented, God cleansed and blessed that marriage to the point** that out of that marriage came Solomon, and Solomon who would have a son who would have a son who would have a son... whose name was Jesus. God brought Jesus out of a sexual relationship that began as an affair that led to murder.

- What do we say, friends, but "Amazing grace"?
- Tim Keller: "What does that mean other than God is trying to say to all of us, 'I love redeeming the worst situations. I love redeeming the hardest cases. Go ahead, try me.'"<sup>8</sup>

I'll admit, part of me finds this scandalous. Some of you think, **"Well, where is the justice in all that?"** You were hurt by your spouse...

**I think of Uriah:** God, no, you are blessing David with Solomon... he slept with my wife and murdered me!" And I imagine God gave Uriah a vision... of a mysterious one hanging on a cross. And he says to Uriah, "He is paying for David's sin against you... *and your sin against me.*" "Who is it, Lord?" It is I. And I'm going to bring his dead body back to life to show that I can overturn ever cursed thing for good."

It was poured out on Jesus. You say, **"It's not fair they don't pay** for their sin!" **Thank God that fairness** ended in the Garden of Eden After that, we live by grace.

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<sup>8</sup> Tim Keller, "Marriage, Divorce, & Singleness," Genesis 2; Matthew 19:3-12

Jesus was **torn apart for the hurt they gave to you.** In the cross, we find forgiveness for the sins done by us, and healing for the ones done unto us.

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved an unfaithful wretch like me; I once was lost but now I'm found, was blind but now I see.*

*The Lord has promised good to me; his word my hope secures! He will my shield and portion be, as long as life endures!*