

Divorce and Remarriage (Mt. 19:3-9)

I. THE SANCTITY OF MARRIAGE

- A. This handout is not comprehensive in addressing all the pastoral applications related to divorce and remarriage. It only provides a framework for seeking God’s wisdom for specific situations.
- B. Scripture teaches the sanctity of marriage. Therefore, divorce and remarriage are only permitted for two reasons—adultery and desertion (as supported by the Westminster Confession of Faith).
- C. God connects the power of prayer to the sanctity of the marriage covenant. He hates the sin that causes divorce and its consequences. Men were leaving “the wife of their youth” (v. 14). They divorced their older wives for younger women. The Lord called this “dealing treacherously” with their wives (v. 14, 15, 16). God hates it when a man abandons his wife. This passage is not saying that God hates it when His people insist on the biblical grounds for divorce when needed.
- ¹³You cover the altar of the Lord with tears...He does not regard the offering...¹⁴Yet you say, “For what reason?” Because the Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; she is your...wife by covenant...¹⁶The Lord ...hates divorce...take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously. (Mal. 2:13-16)*
- ⁷Husbands...giving honor to the wife...that your prayers may not be hindered. (1 Pet. 3:7)*

II. DIVORCE IS ALLOWED FOR ADULTERY (MT. 19:3-9)

- A. In Matthew 19, the Pharisees attempted to trap Jesus in His views on marriage. In verse 3, they brought up the hotly debated passage of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and asked for His position on it. A controversy about divorce existed between the rival rabbinic schools of Hillel and Shammai.
- B. In Matthew 19:5, Jesus refers to God’s original intention for marriage, that man and wife are no longer two, but one flesh, and that no man should separate them (Gen. 2:24). This is a prophetic picture of the union between Jesus and the Church (Eph. 5:30-32). God defined marriage as *exclusive*, between one man and one woman, and *permanent*, one flesh, not to be separated.
- ³“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?” ⁴And He answered and said to them, “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ ⁵and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’ [Gen. 2:24]? ⁶So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.” (Mt. 19:3-6)*
- C. Because of the hardness of the heart or human sin and weakness (v. 8), God allows divorce.
- ⁷They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?” ⁸He said, “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives... ⁹Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.” (Mt. 19:7-9)*

- D. ***Immorality:*** Jesus gave only one reason for divorce—sexual immorality (v. 9). The Greek word is *porneia*; it refers to various acts of immorality including adultery and other acts of immorality. The biblical basis for divorce is “acts” of immorality (not just thoughts). In other words, viewing pornography is not a biblical basis for divorce unless it is acted out in physical ways.
- E. ***Principle:*** Whoever **first** violates the physical bond of the marriage covenant, by having sexual intercourse with one who is not their spouse, breaks the covenant and, thus, commits adultery. Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery (Mt. 19:9).
⁹Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery. (Mt. 19:9)
- F. Anyone who divorces his wife *causes* her to commit adultery (Mt. 5:32). There are two silent implications behind this statement. First, that he is never involved in another sexual relationship and second, she will be forced by economic pressures to get remarried.
³²Whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery. (Mt. 5:32)

III. DIVORCE IS ALLOWED FOR DESERTION (1 COR. 7:15)

- A. ***Desertion for the faith:*** Paul encountered a new situation in the conversion of Gentiles as the gospel went to the nations. Certain homes were divided due to belief in Christ with only one spouse converting to the faith. This new situation was the context for a second exception for divorce and remarriage due to circumstances that Jesus did not address. It is for those who are deserted for the faith. The deserted spouse is not bound to the marriage covenant.
¹⁵But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. (1 Cor. 7:15)
- B. ***A converted spouse*** was not to leave their unconverted spouse. The converted spouse *sanctifies* the family by influencing them through being a vessel of grace in their home and family life.
¹²If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. ¹³And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. ¹⁴For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband... (1 Cor. 7:12-14)
- C. ***Separated couples:*** Believers who are separated for reasons other than adultery or desertion are not to seek remarriage. For example, viewing pornography and various levels of emotional abuse may lead to separation but they are not grounds for divorce until an act of adultery is committed. Physical abuse is not clearly addressed in Scripture and thus requires special consideration.
¹⁰A wife is not to depart from her husband. ¹¹But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. (1 Cor. 7:10-11)
- D. Anyone who divorces and remarries for reasons other than the two given in Scripture should **remain married**, yet acknowledge that they committed an **act** of adultery by remarrying. The Lord can honor the remarriage since they are not in a **permanent state** of adultery.