



First Baptist Church Selmer

SERMON ON THE MOUNT • JESUS & DIVORCE • MATTHEW 5:31-32; 19:3-9 • 10/5/2025

MAIN POINT

Though divorce is permitted in Scripture in specific circumstances, it is never commanded. Reconciliation, if possible, is God's design for conflict both inside and outside of marriage.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Have you or someone close to you been affected in some way by divorce?

Why is it so difficult to talk about?

There is no way around it. Divorce, in one way or another, has affected everyone. God's design for marriage is for two separate people (a man & woman) to become "*one flesh*" (Gen. 2:24). Divorce is the process of taking apart that oneness and turning it back into two. If something is sewn together, it is impossible to cleanly separate it into two parts again without causing great pain and hardship.

Thankfully, God has not left us to deal with the pain of divorce alone. Late pastor John MacArthur states, "The many confused and conflicting ideas in our day about the biblical teaching on divorce are not caused by a deficiency in God's revelation but by the fact that sin has clouded men's minds to the straightforward simplicity of what God has said."

We hope today to unpack God's Word to better understand and respond to divorce and those affected by divorce.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 5:31-32.

31 *"It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' 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."* (ESV)

What can we learn from these verses?

What is your first reaction when you hear these verses?

Why is it important to read these verses in the full context of the Sermon on the Mount with an understanding of Jesus' remarks related to the letter of the law versus the intentions of the heart?

Unfortunately, marriage—like sex—has fallen under the shadow of sin. God intended the marriage covenant to be a reflection of the covenant He makes with His own people. Because of sin, however, marriages have failed to live up to God's standard.

Jesus called us back to the sacred nature of marriage while also addressing the common Jewish mis-teachings of the day. Among Jewish leaders, there were two conflicting rabbinical schools of thought. The teaching of Shammai stated that divorce was permissible for "anything improper", such as the act of adultery. But the school of Hillel (the growing view of Jesus' day) taught that a husband was allowed to divorce his wife for any reason at all.

Reasons for divorce included but were not limited to: "if she were barren... if she had epilepsy... if she failed to perform certain services in the home...if she had certain physical defects... if her head was wedge-shaped, turnip-shaped, or hammer-shaped... if she had no eyebrows... if her eyes were as big as a calf or small like a goose...if she had bony ankles or knees" (*Mishnah*, Jewish book of oral traditions)

According to *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary*, Akin writes, "The Old Testament Law on divorce was designed to protect the wife from frivolous divorce and character assassination."

Divorce may have been permitted for certain biblical reasons, but divorce was never intended to be the first option for marriage. Jesus clearly condemns the religious elites for

their unbiblical teaching on divorce, but also doesn't condone the practice of divorce either. Jesus loves and values marriage highly as a covenant relationship that ultimately reflects the relationship He has with His bride, the church.

How has our culture devalued the importance of marriage?

What steps can you take to resist temptation and to cling to faithfulness within your marriage?

How do we love God and love others in a culture of divorce?

In this passage, Jesus is encouraging us to hold onto marriage. Daniel Akin states, "Today... in our enlightened way of thinking, we don't need a reason at all to end a marriage by divorce. We call it 'no-fault' divorce. Jesus, in Matthew 5 and 19, clearly and forcefully condemns the idea of frivolous divorce that was gaining popularity in his day... Marriage is a sacred, divine, and ordained institution given as a gift by a great God. We dare not trifle with it."

When done God's way—with selflessness, faithfulness, and trust—marriage can be one of His greatest blessings for mankind while here on earth.

St. Augustine once said, "It is human to err. It is devilish to remain willfully in error." How does this quote align with what we have learned from Jesus' words in Matthew 5:31-32?

Jesus addressed divorce in greater depth later in Matthew 19. Let's take a quick look today to help us better understand the full scope of Jesus' teaching.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 19:3-9.

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.'" (ESV)

What does it mean to be "*one flesh*"?

Who is it that joins a man and a woman together in marriage?

The union of marriage is so intimate that the Bible teaches us that we are no longer two separate people, but one flesh. In marriage, we share our bodies, our dreams, our finances, our sorrows, and our joy. If we are cruel and sinful to our spouse, then we are harming ourselves as well (Ephesians 5:28-29). This is why divorce is so painful: we are tearing ourselves in two. Almost anyone who has had to go through a divorce, even in cases when they were not at fault, will testify that this is the case.

Though the preacher or Justice of the Peace pronounces a married couple "man and wife," they are married by God. Christians recognize the legitimacy of one man, one woman marriage, even when they are joined in unbelief, because we recognize that God puts husband and wife together, even if the couple doesn't know it.

When we take our vows before the Lord, we enter into a covenant solemnly before the Lord God Himself. He bears witness to our vows, and He is the one who will hold us accountable if we break them. A covenant is a mutual commitment between parties to do certain things. In marriage, we promise to love, honor, and cherish our spouse until one of us dies. We ought to daily ask God to help us honor this commitment, no matter how difficult times in our marriage may be.

But it is also very important that we understand that divorce has affected everyone. No matter if we, or someone we love, has sinned, God is a gracious and forgiving God who immediately and fully forgives confessed sin (1 John 1:9).

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What is one way you can extend forgiveness to someone this week in the same way God extends forgiveness to us?

Consider a practical way you can serve your spouse this week. For example, intentionally do the one thing around the house your spouse doesn't enjoy doing.

Do you know of someone who is dealing with the pain or hardship following divorce? Initiate a conversation with that person and share God's love with

them through a word of encouragement and prayer.

PRAYER

Close your time in prayer by asking God to help you be vigilant of the temptations around you. Pray for the people in your church and community who are struggling with unresolved conflict or the temptation to divorce—that they would find freedom in Christ.

COMMENTARY

| MATTHEW 5:31-32

5:31-32 Jesus challenged a loose rabbinic paraphrase of Deut 24:1 that distorted the original meaning of the text. In the hands of the rabbis, Deut 24:1 greatly multiplied the number of offenses that could justify divorce. For instance, rabbinic commentaries on Deut 24 cited minor complaints such as a wife's fading beauty or her tendency to burn food as legitimate grounds for divorce. However, Jesus kept true to Deut 24:1 and insisted that sexual immorality is the legitimate grounds for divorce. People who divorce for frivolous reasons and remarry are guilty of adultery since their original marriage covenant has not been genuinely dissolved.

| MATTHEW 19:3-9

19:3-9 First-century Pharisees who associated themselves with Hillel's school were liberal toward divorce. They permitted it for virtually any reason, including such ridiculous grounds as the wife burning her husband's supper or having physical defects like bushy eyebrows.

God ordained marriage both by creation and command. He created two complementary genders, male and female, and commanded one man and one woman to unite in marriage. Since God ordained marriage, human efforts to dissolve it constitute an attack on God's own work.

The Lord strongly taught that marriage is viewed by God as an indissoluble union and that marriages should not be terminated by divorce. The "exception clause", except for marital unfaithfulness (*porneias*), is understood in several ways by Bible scholars. Four of these ways are: (a) a single act of adultery, (b) unfaithfulness during the period of betrothal

(Matt. 1:19), (c) marriage between near relatives (Lev. 18:6-18), or (d) continued promiscuity. - Louis A. Barbieri, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*