

END-TIMES ISSUES



#113

Commandment #7 –
Divorce issues (1).

GOD DOESN'T TELL US TO
KNOW ALL THE END-TIME DETAILS.
HE TELLS US TO BE READY.

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1

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT DIVORCE
AND MARRYING SOMEONE ELSE?



TO UNDERSTAND THIS, WE NEED TO FIRST RECALL
WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT MARRIAGE.

- **Marriage, based on what we can understand today:**
 - ✓ God created marriage in humans to be a reflection of his own nature. The unity of "male-female" is a *finite* reflection of the "Father-Son-Holy Spirit" unity.
 - ✓ Just as it would be *unthinkable* for the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to separate and to pursue other gods (which would obviously have to be *false* gods), so should it be *unthinkable* for a human "male-female unit" to break up, and the parts pursue other spouses.
 - ✓ **Yet even what was understood in the Old Testament era was enough that it should have been considered unthinkable.**

(= in the New Testament era)
2

GOD DEFINED "MARRIAGE."

(It wasn't *people* inventing a convenient way of doing things.)

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and **they will become one flesh.**
Genesis 2:24 (BSB)

- Some people might try to convince you that it was *Adam* who said this... but *Jesus knew better!*

Jesus answered, "Have you not read that from the beginning **the Creator** 'made them male and female,' and **said**, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?"
Matthew 19:4-5 (BSB)

- He would know, because *he* was the Creator (John 1:3, 10; Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:2; etc.)!

3

- Jesus' conclusion, based on the *fact* that God defined marriage, was:

"So they are no longer two, but **one flesh**. Therefore **what God has joined together**, let man not separate."
Matthew 19:6 (BSB)

 - ✓ First, he says that they are no longer two, but one flesh – and that **GOD** did it. Then he gives a stern warning: *Don't separate something that is now one!*

We shall see that, from the perspective of *civil regulations*, people do make these separations (and we will also see *why* they do it). But we will also see that, *from the perspective of God*, **this separation does not actually occur!**

- There is one more important issue: the reason God did this.

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.
Genesis 2:24 (BSB)

4

THE VERY NATURE OF WHAT HUMANS WERE CREATED TO BE IS THE REASON THAT GOD DEFINES MARRIAGE THE WAY HE DID.

(This is related to the nature and purpose of *gender*.)

- First, God defined humans as being comprised of two biological genders: Male and female. No more and no less. (Harmful mutations and deformities that have occurred since sin entered the world do not change this fact.)

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; **male and female** He created them.
Genesis 1:27 (BSB)

- But this gender issue is more than just *biological*... it's *relational*. And this relationship is specifically defined. Adam recognized this, and verbally expressed the definition (Genesis 2:23). God affirmed that it was true, by using it as the basis for the definition of "marriage."

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- These two humans, already *biologically* defined (Genesis 1:27), would also be defined in terms of how they would relate to each other:

And the man said:
"This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for out of man she was taken."
Genesis 2:23 (BSB)

 - The context before this verse shows *how* this relationship is to work. Though sin has complicated matters and made God's definition often difficult to follow, *it has not changed the definition*.
 - Since this definition was accurate, as expressed by Adam, who (at that time) had no sin to affect his *thinking*, God used it as the basis for defining marriage, and for explaining how this marriage relationship would come to be.

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother ...
Genesis 2:24a (BSB)

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WHEN DOES THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP COMES TO AN END – ACCORDING TO GOD?

- **In Genesis**, before sin entered the world, *no end was given*. God had turned the *two* into *one*.
- **The Law given to Moses** gives no direct statement on that issue. But it *does* say that those committing adultery were to be put to death – and doing that would effectively end the marriage relationship.
- **Paul**, in the New Testament, says that it ends at death; and any other relationship *before* that constitutes *adultery*.

... a married woman is **bound** by law to her husband **as long as he lives**. But if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. So then, if she is joined to another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress; but **if her husband dies, she is free from that law** and is not an adulteress, even if she marries another man.

Romans 7:2-3 (BSB)

7

- **Jesus** did *not* say that the marriage bond can be broken. Instead, he said, "Don't try to break what God has united."
 ✓ As we look at what he says (below), we will see that he does **NOT** consider divorce as a means of breaking the marriage bond. [His focus is on God's perspective, based on Genesis 2:24, not on the perspective of civil regulations.]
 ✓ In another passage, he says that there will *not* be marriage at the resurrection (Matthew 22:30) – but that is a different issue.
- **WHAT CAN WE CONCLUDE?**
 ✓ The only "ending of marriage" statements (based on what God defines marriage to be) point to death as the only way.
 ✓ Since *death* was *not* a part of God's original design for marriage, his original intention was for marriage to *not* end. **Never**. Not for all eternity.
 ✓ It is only because of *death* (the consequence of sin in the world), that the idea of "ending a marriage" ever came into existence.

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MARRIAGE AFTER DIVORCE – ACCORDING TO JESUS.

- We've already seen that, in God's sight, marriage ends only at death – and this "ending" exists *only* because sin in the world has *destroyed* something that was meant to last *forever*.
 ✓ As Paul said, a person whose spouse has died is *free to marry* another person... and doing so is *not* sin (Romans 7:3b). He also affirms this in 1 Corinthians 7, with only one requirement (⇒ it must be a *saved* person). Even so, the option of remaining unmarried should be considered (v. 40). (The reasons for this are given previously in the chapter.)

A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is **free to marry** anyone she wishes, **as long as he belongs to the Lord**.

1 Corinthians 7:39 (BSB)

- **Our question now is about divorced people**: Does God consider them "free to marry"? We are going to look at what God sees, based on Genesis 2:24. (Next time, we will focus on the civil regulations issue.) →

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BACKGROUND ISSUES: THE CONTEXT OF WHAT JESUS SAYS.

- **Matthew, Mark and Luke all include statements on divorce after marriage**. The main passages are in Matthew 19:3-12 and Mark 10:2-12, which focus on the religious leaders' attempt to trap Jesus, by forcing him to say something that could be used against him. Luke makes a general statement in Luke 16:18. There is also a statement found in Matthew 5:31-32, which is part of the "Sermon on the Mount."
- **Matthew, Mark and Luke wrote to different audiences that were quite different on their perspectives of divorce and marriage**. This influenced what each author needed to say, in order for the readers to *accurately* understand and apply Jesus' message. (Some groups needed *more* explanation than others!)
- **A problem in today's context**: The Matthew passages include an "exception clause." In recent years, there has been a tendency for people to focus on this "exception" (interpreting it based on what they *want* to believe), and to *ignore* passages that say there is *no* exception. (We will examine this, and see why it's included in Matthew, but not in the other accounts.)

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BACKGROUND ISSUES: THE DIFFERENT AUDIENCES THE GOSPELS WERE WRITTEN TO.

- **Matthew** was written to the Jews. Divorce was common, but was almost always initiated by the *men*.
 ✓ There were some other practices associated with Jewish marriages, which required Matthew to include an "exception" that was unnecessary for the *non-Jewish* communities.
- **Mark** was written to the Romans. Divorce was exceedingly common, and was practiced by both *men and women*, often *several times* during a lifetime. Marriage was almost like "legalized prostitution."
 ✓ Because of this, Mark needed to emphasize that what Jesus said also applied to the *women* who were often the ones initiating the divorces (so that they could "legally" go to their next partner).
- **Luke** was written to the Greeks. Divorce was actually quite rare.
 ✓ This means Luke just needed to state the basics, without going into all the details mentioned in Matthew and Mark.

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These different audiences needed different information!

- ✓ **ALL 3** would need the basic statement: "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery" (or something similar). These basic statements would be addressed to the *men* who chose to divorce their wives.
 » We see this in: Matthew 19:9; Mark 10:11b; Luke 16:18a.
- ✓ **Mark** would need to emphasize that what Jesus said also applied to the *women* who were frequently the ones initiating the divorces.
 » We see this in: Mark 10:12.
- ✓ **Matthew and Luke** mention some of the horrible consequences that involve the others – those who did *not* initiate the divorce. (*Few* people in Mark's audience would fit into this category.)
 » We see this in: Matthew 5:32b; Luke 16:18b.
- ✓ **The Matthew "exception clause"** requires us to look deeper into the issue.
 » These "exceptions" are found in: Matthew 5:32a; 19:9.

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- What does Jesus say?

- 1 The man who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery. Matthew, Mark and Luke all include this basic fact.

Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery ...

Luke 16:18a (BSB)

Now I tell you that whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman, commits adultery.

Matthew 19:9 (BSB)

Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her.

Mark 10:11b (BSB)

- ✓ We will examine Matthew's "exception clause" shortly. *Don't ignore the passages that don't include it!* We shouldn't interpret these verses in ways that contradict each other! Otherwise, we end up with Scripture contradicting itself. (We will look at this issue shortly.)

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- 2 Mark has to state that the principle also applies to women who divorce their husbands and marry another man – since doing so was a common practice among the Romans.

And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.

Mark 10:12 (BSB)

- 3 Matthew and Luke both include warnings that anyone who marries a divorced woman also commits adultery.

... he who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Luke 16:18b (BSB)

And he who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Matthew 5:32b (BSB)

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- 4 In Matthew, we read that when a man divorces his wife, he causes her to commit adultery. (Here, we also have the "exception" clause, which we will examine. But also, we are probably wondering how he can cause her to commit adultery. We will look at this in the future.)

But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, brings adultery upon her.*

*[Footnote: Or: causes her to commit adultery.]

Matthew 5:32a (BSB)

- DO THESE STATEMENTS BY JESUS SURPRISE YOU? It surprised the apostles! They concluded that, if all the above situations amounted to adultery, it would be better to remain single (celibate)!

His disciples said to Him, "If this is the case between a man and his wife, it is better not to marry."

Matthew 19:10 (BSB)

- ✓ Jesus' response: Celibacy is a good option, but *not everyone is capable of doing this* (verses 11-12). This agrees with what the apostle Paul later says; and we plan to look at this at another time.

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NOW FOR THE BIG ISSUE:

WHAT ABOUT THE "EXCEPTION CLAUSE"?

⇒ What is the reason for it? Do passages that have it contradict the passages that don't have it?

- We should not choose to interpret Scripture so that it creates a genuine contradiction! It is NOT necessary; nor is it legitimate! But we need to consider several issues, such as: ① who the gospels were written to, ② what is meant by "sexual immorality" (in the "exception clause"), and ③ Jewish marriage practices. (We already looked at the first of these issues.)
- Such information is readily available in many places – commentaries and Bible reference books, Study Bibles and even non-Christian sources. *But even if we didn't have any of this information, and didn't completely understand these things, we could rest assured that the Bible does not contradict itself.* Rather than making accusations about the Bible, we could simply admit the fact that we don't understand it!

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- BACKGROUND ISSUES RELATED TO THE "EXCEPTION CLAUSE."

- ✓ This "exception" was needed in the account directed toward the Jews. It was not needed for the non-Jewish communities – for several reasons:

- 1 The religious leaders had asked a specific question. Because of the nature of this question, this part of the conversation did *not* need to be included in the accounts written to the non-Jews.

Then some Pharisees came and tested Him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason?"

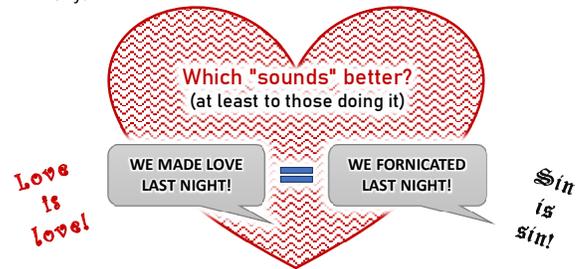
Matthew 19:3 (BSB)

- ✓ This was intended as a trap. Some religious leaders claimed that there were limits; others claimed that there were absolutely no limits. They wanted Jesus to agree with one group, thus alienating him from the other. But Jesus went back to God's definition of marriage (and what it implies), thus escaping the trap.
- ✓ But he says there is one situation in which divorce is permissible...

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- 2 What does Jesus mean by "sexual immorality"?

- ✓ This phrase is from a Greek word, *porneia*, which used to be translated as "fornication." This specific word has fallen out of use, probably because so many young people in our society practice it; and *people don't like to apply to themselves words that sound so "sinful."*



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- **What does this word "fornication" mean?**

- ✓ In most cases, it simply refers to sexual activity that does NOT involve married people.
- ✓ It is NOT the word used for "adultery"; and because of this, there are many passages where both of these words are found. (This includes all passages in Matthew that mention fornication – Matthew 5:32; 15:19; 19:9.)
- ✓ In limited contexts, this word can be used to generally refer to all sinful sexual activity (including adultery); but the word "adultery" will not be present. In this case, it's simply referring to "sinful sexual activity," without the specific type of activity being defined.

- **What is the significance of this?**

- ✓ This "exception" does not apply to married people!
- ✓ But if that is the case, who does it apply to? To answer this question, we need to understand the Jewish concept of "betrothal." →

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3 BETROTHAL – a Jewish practice not found among the non-Jews.

Some may instantly reply that non-Jews *did* practice "betrothal." But in reality, what they did had little in common with what the Jews did.

- ✓ **The Romans and Greeks** sometimes had a type of "betrothal" that involved arrangements between the families, or even just the parents (not the individuals who were getting married). When practiced, it might include a variety of arrangements; and was often a time for settling legal and financial matters. But it was not the marriage.
- ✓ **Jewish betrothal** was quite different. The two were considered legally married. The situation could be broken only through a legal divorce.

Betrothal was like:

"Marriage Part 1" or "Marriage without consummation."

It would last for about a year,
and would be followed by:

"Marriage Part 2" or "Marriage with consummation."

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- **What is the significance of this?**

- ✓ **Joseph and Mary** (the mother of Jesus) were betrothed. They were considered married, but without sexual union.
 - » Some translations may replace the word "betrothal" with something else, because most people today don't understand the concept. But the word is found in these passages: Matthew 1:18; Luke 1:27; 2:5. They were also considered husband and wife – Matthew 1:16, 19-20, 24.
- ✓ **Mary was found to be pregnant** "before they came together" (Matthew 1:18). This event did not occur until after Jesus had been born (Matthew 1:25).
 - » If this pregnancy had been caused by a man (rather than by the Holy Spirit), it would have occurred by means of fornication with someone who was not her husband.
- ✓ **Joseph could have rightfully divorced her** (assuming that her pregnancy was caused by another man). In doing so, he would not have broken the male-female union described in Genesis 2:24, because the physical union had not yet occurred.

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- **Getting back to the "exception" clause...**

- ✓ **In the Jewish context, not having the "exception"** would have meant that *Joseph would have been sinning*, if Mary's pregnancy had been through another man. Yet Scripture says he was acting righteously (Matthew 1:19).
 - » Mary's sin (if it had been a sin) would have been fornication, not adultery, since it would have been outside of the "married with consummation" context.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

- Hopefully, we have answered some questions and shown that Scripture is consistent in what it says about divorce in God's sight.
- But we have also raised a number of questions that we will have to look at next time.
 - ↳ This topic has been so greatly distorted in the past half of a century, that we need to go step-by-step through it.

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OUR MISSION: FOCUS ON GOD AND HIS GRACE!

- ✓ We plan to examine more issues next time.

Yet whatever we discover, ...

We can be confident in Christ!

- ✓ We can be confident that what we discover will not contradict what God has said about grace and salvation. We have hope!

↳ As we submit to God and his Word, we can trust God to take care of our weaknesses, and to give us hearts that are devoted to him... even if our lives are a mess (which can involve the violation of any commandment).

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It's **easy** to say something that pleases people who want to please themselves.

It **takes time** to be accurate, to please people who want to please God.

Credits

SCRIPTURE

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