

Matthew 19:1-10

Just what is a marriage? There is a lot of noise, confusion and pain on this topic in our culture and even among believers. What was God's intent in marriage, and how do we, as Christians, live that reality out? What did the Lord Jesus think of marriage, and divorce? Where did he go for information, wisdom and authority on these matters?

Jesus and the apostle Paul both taught on marriage as well as divorce. Both relied upon the writings of God's prophet, Moses, as God's authoritative and expressed will for the purpose and design of marriage. We would do well and be wise to follow their lead in our lives, decisions and advice, for in their teaching the Spirit of God lives and breathes life! Let's take a look at one key passage (and we'll examine others in subsequent sermons).

Matt. 19:3 ¶ *Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?”*

Opening legal question: They're *not* asking Jesus an open question about divorce, as in “is divorce ever lawful?” It clearly was in certain circumstances. He's asked specifically to narrowly adjudicate between the rabbinic schools and associated divorce courts of rabbis **Hillel** and **Shamai**. Each school focused in on the interpretation of **Deut 24:1**.

Hillel focused on “some matter” and interpreted that as “any matter” (“any reason”), even if she burnt his toast. **Shamai** focused on “indecency” (some kind of serious immorality) and would grant divorces only on those much narrower, serious grounds. Hillel courts were quick and quiet because they relied mostly on the witness of the husband. Shamai courts were longer and a careful and open investigation into the “indecency/immorality” claims was made.

Matt. 19:4 And He answered and said, “Have you not read that He who created *them* from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE,

Jesus takes them away from the question (“When can we get a divorce?”) and redirects them to the greater questions first: **Found in Genesis 1:27**

What was God's *design* in creating mankind? The word for “created” here in Genesis is *bara*. It means to create from nothing, not merely to reshape or reform that which already exists. *Bara* speaks of original design and existence out of no prior thing. And, what is God's *intent in the world* in the calling for the unique devotion, and physical union of husband and wife?

Matt. 19:5 and 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”? **Matt. 19:6** “So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”

Matt. 19:7 They *said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND *her* AWAY?”

Matt. 19:8 He *said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.

Matt. 19:9 “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

Matt. 19:10 ¶ The disciples *said to Him, “If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry.”

Jesus brings their attention to **Genesis 2:24**

And Jesus interpretation follows here: God's intent, though perfect, is not always perfectly attended to or obeyed in deed and action. Thus, when people sin and break their vows, it can result in separation/divorce.

The pharisees view what Moses wrote in Deut 24:1 as a command (a moral requirement with duty to obey) to divorce one's wife. Thus, whether it was “any matter” (Hillel) or more narrowly “immorality” (Shamai) found in the wife, they saw these as *requiring immediate divorce in order to be obedient to the Law*.

By the way, the only thing necessary to be written by the scribe on the divorce certificate, the *get*, (on a piece of pottery for permanence) was the man and woman's names and the words, “*You are free to marry any Jewish man you wish.*” Remarriage with a valid *get* was implied.

Jesus points out that both schools have misinterpreted Moses' intent by thinking he *commands* or *requires* a man to divorce his wife if a deficit is found in her.

Divorce was *permitted* (not *commanded/required*), as a sad allowance, when the guilty party in a marriage willfully persisted, with a “hard heart”, in violation of the marriage vows.

Jesus sides with the school and divorce court of Shamai on the interpretation. And then he goes on to tell them that those that have obtained Hillel “any matter” divorces are in fact, not properly divorced and involve both the man and the new “wife” in the act of adultery!

The disciples, accustomed to and liking the Hillel arrangement are taken aback!

“If a man can't put away his wife for any reason and quietly, then why get married at all?!”

How does Jesus' view of marriage and God's intent impact you and your views and outlook?