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# Can One Divorce For Just Any Reason?

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Divorce is now commonly accepted in modern society. Almost every state has legislated laws permitting “no fault” divorce. Fifty years ago divorce was rare. Nearly everyone, today, has experienced the pain of seeing a loving, monogamous relationship ripped apart by divorce.

How did divorce become so common? Several factors have played a role in the casual dissolution of holy matrimony. First, families are not as influential on or supportive of marriage. At one time a family would disown or ostracize a relative who divorced for just any reason. If a marriage was in trouble, the family would join together and use its combined years of experience, wisdom, and support to encourage the couple. Today, parents, in-laws, siblings, etc. seem all too eager to see a marriage break-up instead of make-up. Second, society in general no longer uses its collective power to pressure couples to make a marriage work. Third, laws and courts that once protected marriages and discouraged divorce, except for adultery, etc., now have made obtaining a divorce cheaper and easier than getting married. Finally, religion has acceded to mob rule and will no longer support Biblical teachings regarding divorce. Churches are now just bandaging up the victims of divorce with support groups instead of allowing the authority of Christ to address the matter of divorce.

When divorce becomes common place and acceptable in the world and among the denominations, you can count on the fact that New Testament Christians are going to be strongly influenced. Some will just approve of divorce because it is culturally acceptable and legal. Others will twist the teachings of the New Testament to permit the scandalous disgrace of divorce.

What would Jesus say if He was permitted to

answer the question: “Can one divorce for just any reason?” In fact, Jesus was asked this very question by the Pharisees. He gave a very detailed and concise answer in Matthew 19:1-9.

Jesus was passing through the territory of Perea (which means “beyond”, i.e. it was the land beyond the Jordan River). While healing the people, He was approached by the Pharisees. They asked Him, *“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?”* (19:3). The question was not asked by enquiring minds but for the purpose of testing Him or discrediting Jesus publicly before the people. Perea was the territory ruled by Herod Antipas. The same Herod whom John the Immerser condemned for having an unlawful marriage to his brother Philip’s wife, Herodias. As a result of his teaching, John was imprisoned and later beheaded (Matt. 14:3-12). Perhaps, the Pharisees were hoping that Jesus would speak out and meet the same fate as His cousin. At least Jesus would go against the popular beliefs and practices of Jewish society by taking the unpopular and unscriptural view of rabbi Shammai who declared that divorce was never permitted. The Pharisees accepted the teachings of rabbi Hillel who permitted the Jews to divorce for such minor marital grievances as burning the bread or putting too much salt in the food.

Jesus started to answer by pointing out that the Scriptures were clear on this matter: *“Have you not read...”* This would have been an insult to the Pharisees, since they considered themselves experts in the Law of Moses. He was indicating that the Pharisees should have discovered that answer for themselves by reading the Bible.

Instead of referring to a learned rabbi or a command from the Law of Moses, Jesus points to God who designed marriage from the very beginning to be a monogamous and permanent relationship. *“He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female’”* (19:4). God in His wisdom and perfect creation only made one man and one woman. This not only rules out polygamy, polyandry, homosexuality, etc. but it also rules out divorce. God gave Eve to Adam to be his wife. If that did not work out there was no other woman to choose. God did not make another woman or two on the side just in case Eve put too

much starch on his fig leaf. So, Jesus is saying, “No, a man cannot divorce his wife for just any reason because God only made one man and one woman in His perfect creation.”

Next, to further answer the question, Jesus quoted Genesis 2:24 in verse Matthew 19:5: *“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife.”* Keep in mind that this was not said for the sake of Adam and Eve so much as for their posterity. After all, they did not have a mother and father, but they were joined by God together in marriage. The term for “*joined*” here carries the idea of being “glued together” or “cemented together as one.” Once cemented, they are never meant to come apart. Again, Jesus answers the question posed by the Pharisees: “No! God joined them to one another, so they were never to come apart.”

Jesus takes up another argument to support His teaching as verse five continues: *“and the two shall become one flesh?”* So then, *they are no longer two but one flesh.* The man and the woman are no longer two distinct individuals who can leave and do as they please with whomever they please. Instead, the two are one. “One flesh” may denote the sex act in which a couple will produce a child which is literally the product of two becoming one. Again, Jesus answers, “No! Because two have been made into one and one is not to be divided into two.”

In verse six, Jesus concludes His answer for the moment by saying, *“Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”* A husband and wife are like inseparable siamese twins – to separate them would bring destruction. In the marriage two become one. When one of the marriage partners puts the other away unscripturally then one becomes two, and God’s arrangement has been disregarded. God made the marriage, man has no right to destroy what God has created. The answer to the Pharisees’ questions is still, “No! Because man does not have the right to separate what God has created.”

The Pharisees are not satisfied with Jesus’ answer which is based on the creation account in Genesis. They have a ready rebuttal from Deuteronomy 24:1-4 which is alluded to in their argument in verse seven. *“They said to Him, ‘Why then did Moses*

*command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?'"* Jesus immediately counters their argument in verse eight, *"Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so."* A quick reading of the text in Deuteronomy will show two distinct facts: 1) This was not a command from Moses but a concession and 2) divorce was not allowed for any reason but for a case of "uncleanness" or "nakedness." Whatever this involved it was not adultery. After all, adulterers were executed (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22-24). It must have been something just short of adultery, such as allowing another man to see her nakedness or to touch her inappropriately. However, it does not support the idea of Rabbi Hillel and the Pharisees of divorcing a wife for just any reason (like burning the toast). The Pharisees were pitting Moses against Jesus. Jesus is essentially refuting this by implying, "No! Moses did not say, 'Yes, you can divorce for just any reason.' If you want to quote Moses, God's Lawgiver, you must go back to the creation account in Genesis for the answer to your question."

Having quoted Genesis to support His teaching on divorce, Jesus now speaks from His own authority in verse nine: *"And I say to you..."* He now reminds them of His previous teaching on divorce (see Mt. 5:32) as verse nine continues, *"whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery."* Jesus gives the one and only exception for divorce and that is sexual immorality or adultery. A paraphrase of Jesus' answer would read: "No! I say you cannot divorce for just any reason. The only reason for divorce is sexual immorality."

There is one more reason why Jesus forbids divorce for just any reason. If a man divorces his wife for just any reason he causes her to commit adultery when she remarries. Divorce for any reason is not guilt-free option. A mate cannot divorce his or her spouse for just any cause and walk away innocent of any sin. Jesus' qualification *"except for sexual immorality"* only permits the innocent party who remarries to do so without becoming an adulterer or adulteress. So Jesus is giving a final "No! Because divorce for just any old reason causes others to enter adulterous relationships

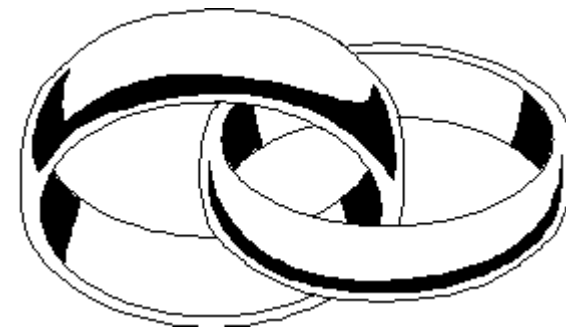
when they remarry and you will be held accountable for your role in these sins."

*"Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?"* What did Jesus say? He said, "No...No...No...No...No...NO...NO!!!" For those who still argue that one can divorce for just any reason Jesus would ask, "What part of 'NO!' don't you understand? I told you 'no' seven times! How is it that you can turn around and say 'yes'?"

Still some will argue that you can divorce for any reason so long as you do not remarry. Jesus never said that. The subject of remarriage did not come up until verse nine and was not part of the original question. This argument would have to be proved using other passages because Jesus only gave one exception for divorce. Furthermore, this argument is still saying "yes" after Jesus has already said "no" seven times.

- Daniel R. Vess

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### Service Times

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Bible Study.....9:30 am  
Worship Service.....10:30 am  
Worship Service.....5:00 pm

#### Wednesday

Bible Study.....7:30 pm

by Daniel R. Vess