



- Marriages are in trouble in our day as much as in the days of our Lord, prompting His teaching on divorce. The only redemptive answer for these problems is found in Christ, and with God's people getting back on track with His design.

### Marriage

- God's vision for the institution of marriage is a monogamous, heterosexual, intimate, faithful, enduring union. (Matt. 19:4-6)
- In the beginning, divorce was inconceivable. Marriage's *one flesh* union emphasized its permanence! There is no other intimacy like it.

### Divorce

- God hates divorce (Mal. 2:14-16). Yet, since fallen people get married, marriage covenants do get broken by sin.
- People of Jesus' day wanted answers to this issue of divorce, as they do today; they want to know where God & the Bible stand on divorce, and where the church stands.
- The Pharisees tried to "test" Jesus in Mt. 19. Controversy over the interpretation of "something indecent" in Deut. 24:1, over many generations, became battle-"grounds" for divorce.

### Rabbinical Rebuttals

- Rabbi Hillel interpreted *indecent* widely. If she spoiled her husband's dinner, walked around with her hair down, or spoke disrespectfully of his parents, he could divorce her.
- Rabbi Akiba went further to permit a man to divorce his wife if he found a woman who was more beautiful. These rabbis reinforced husbands in their selfishness, bigotry & arrogance.
- Rabbi Shammai limited *indecency* to offenses of marital impropriety, short of adultery. In other words, *indecent* didn't refer to adultery, but other types of sexual misconduct.
- Moses never *commanded* divorce. Moses *permitted* it—God's grace made provision for our stubborn, hardened hearts, and for release from the pain of betrayal within marriage.
- If you've experienced betrayal in your marriage, that's not an automatic "out" for you. There is still a higher calling to seek God's design and to restore marital oneness.

(turn over)

### The Bottom Line

- 5:32 and 19:9 declare the intent of the Law: "except for marital unfaithfulness" (*porneia*). Adultery (*moichao*) is not specifically in question here.
- The *certificate of divorce* protected women from exploitation and public censure, prevented her ex-husband from taking advantage of her, and gave her the right to remarry.
- Jesus didn't accept the "easy divorce" practices that developed as a result. His explanation of *when* and *why* divorce is permitted rests on our understanding of the word *porneia*.
- *Porneia* might have involved adultery, but could have included homosexuality, bestiality, prostitution...under Mosaic Law, these sins terminated marriage, not by divorce, but by death! (substituted with divorce under Roman rule).

### Restricted Permission

- Jesus responded to the current issues affecting marriage in His day. Some 20 years later, the Apostle Paul gave apostolic *permission* to believers granting divorce in the case of an unbelieving partner deserting her/him. (1 Cor. 7)
- Malachi (2) spoke God's Word against *violence* in a marriage, addressing the issue of divorce in the case of serious and unrepentant abuse in marriage
- While there may appear to be a number of legitimate causes for divorce...nothing should be allowed to sever it but "unrepentant unfaithfulness."

A few implications for the church:

1. The *innocent* spouse may choose to receive back the *offending* spouse and graciously renew covenant. Let's seek or encourage that, without make it an obligation.
2. The innocent party in a 'lawful' divorce is free to remarry; whereas the offending party is not. (1 Cor. 7.)
3. Even those guilty of 'unlawful' divorces/remarriages can be restored to the church and to a right relationship with God.

### **TAKE IT HOME...for personal reflection**

1. What is the biblical definition of marriage? (Matt. 19:4-6) What types of "unions" are excluded?
2. How does God view marriage and divorce according to Malachi 2:14-16? What is the significance of the term *covenant*?
3. Where there are no biblical grounds for divorce, what are a believer's marriage obligations to their spouse?
4. As evidenced by the teaching in Jesus' day, there is a lot of confusion about "grounds" for divorce—a toxic condition in an environment where marriages are deeply struggling. **Pray** for your marriage, and marriages you know, and for clarity in our Christian response to these problems.