Concerning Christian Marriage, C. S. Lewis wrote,

Christianity teaches that marriage is for life. There is, of course, a difference here between different Churches: some do not admit divorce at all; some allow it reluctantly in very special cases. It is a great pity that Christians should disagree about such a question; but for an ordinary layman the thing to notice is that Churches all agree with one another about marriage a great deal more than any of them agrees with the outside world. I mean, they all regard divorce as something like cutting up a living body, as a kind of surgical operation. Some of them think the operation so violent that it cannot be done at all; others admit it as a desperate remedy in extreme cases. They all agree that it is more like having both your legs cut off than it is like dissolving a business partnership or even deserting a regiment.1

More recently, John MacArthur noted that,

Until modern times, every branch of Christendom – Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant – strongly supported family life and just as strongly opposed divorce. But as their constituencies pled for more concessions to worldly standards and practices, church bodies acquiesced, and the family has suffered the bitter consequences of those compromises.2

Divorce has reached epidemic levels in American culture, both within and outside the church. Faced with this plague, it is incumbent upon the church both to stand firm regarding God’s design for marriage and to minister grace to those who have fallen short of God’s ideal. Four views have commonly been taken regarding the biblical teaching on divorce and remarriage.

- God’s original design was that marriage would be permanent until death. Therefore, neither divorce nor remarriage following divorce is ever approved in Scripture.3

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1 C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity (New York: MacMillian, 1952), 82.
• Divorce is legitimate in very limited circumstances (usually adultery and desertion), but remarriage is not permissible.4
• Divorce is legitimate in cases of adultery or desertion, and remarriage is permissible for the “innocent” party when there has been a legitimate divorce.5
• Divorce and remarriage are both allowed in a wider variety of circumstances.6

One of the critical passages for any discussion of the biblical teaching on divorce and remarriage is Matthew 19:3-12. This passage looms large because it is only here, in v 9, and in Matt 5:32, that Jesus’ prohibition of divorce is qualified with an exception for πορνεία (“immorality”). Debates on whether Jesus allows divorce or remarriage after divorce necessarily center on this passage. In this paper it will be argued that the actual exception for which Jesus allows divorce can be found one verse earlier, in v 8, namely “hardness of heart.”

The Synoptic Parallels

According to the prevailing two-source theory, Matthew 19:3-9 is a redaction of Mark 10:2-12 with some rearrangement of material and addition of the exception clause.7 Davies and Allison

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recognize five versions of Jesus’ teaching on divorce. They suggest that the earliest stage in the tradition was Matt 5:32 without the exception clause. From this developed the version of Jesus’ teaching found in 1 Cor 7:10-11 and from that came Luke 16:18 (Q) and Mark 10:11-12. Finally Matt 5:31-32 and 19:9 developed from the version found in Mark. Davies and Allison conclude that the prohibition on divorce should be assigned to Jesus since it is supported by Mark, Q, and Paul, but the exception clause, which is only found in Matt 5:32; 19:9 is a redactional element coming from the Matthaean church.

However, there are reasons to believe that Matthew has preserved an independent witness to the teaching of Jesus. The initial question by the Pharisees in Matt 19:3, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?" assumes the legitimacy of divorce and better reflects the actual terms of the rabbinic debate where the only question was on what grounds a man is permitted to divorce his wife, not whether he is permitted to do so at all. Mark’s account probably includes an abbreviated version of the question. Instone-Brewer argues that “Mark’s account is smoother and more suitable for presentation in a sermon, while Matthew’s account is more like a debate.” Weibling suggests that rather than seeing Matthew’s account as a redaction of Mark, Mark should be seen as providing a condensed version of Jesus’ discussion with the Pharisees followed by a later discussion with His disciples in private, while Matthew provides a fuller account of the discussion with the Pharisees. Both accounts deserve to be treated as accurate and authoritative accounts of the teaching of Jesus.

Exegesis of Matthew 19:3-12

According to Wenham, Matt 19:3-12 fits a recurring pattern in Jesus’ interactions with His opponents:

1. Someone asks a question.
2. Jesus attacks the very foundations of his opponents’ position.

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8 Davies and Allison, 18.
9 Davies and Allison, 19; Luz, 487.
10 Davies and Allison, 4.
11 Instone-Brewer, Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible, 142.
12 Weibling, 231-232.
3. They counterattack, raising objections from Scripture to his views.
4. Jesus dismisses these objections.
5. Then the disciples interject their struggles with Jesus’ teaching.
6. Jesus reaffirms his own position and challenges his disciples to have faith and accept it.\textsuperscript{13}

\textit{The Pharisees Ask a Question (v 3)}

Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful \textit{for a man} to divorce his wife for any reason at all?" (Matt 19:3 NASB)

The Pharisees were not asking Jesus questions out of curiosity. Their intent was to destroy Him and to discredit Him with the masses. They hoped to embroil Him in their own debates and by forcing Him to take sides to alienate Him from at least part of His constituency. Perhaps they also hoped that His answer would put Him on the wrong side of Herod Antipas who had recently executed John the Baptist for criticizing his marriage to Herodias.\textsuperscript{14} The question was not whether divorce was permitted or not. Both the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel acknowledged that it was. The question was on what grounds is divorce permitted?

A common misconception is that while the Shammaites limited divorce to cases of sexual immorality, the Hillelites allowed divorce for “any cause.” Actually, as Instone-Brewer has shown,\textsuperscript{15} both groups allowed divorce for a number of reasons based on Exod 21:10-11. Where they disagreed was concerning the interpretation of Deut 24:1 and in particular two words, האָרֹת נָכְרָא “nakedness of a matter.” The Shammaites reversed the order of the words and understood them as “a matter of indecency,” which they understood to mean adultery or specifically sexual sin. The Hillelites understood the two words to reflect two separate grounds for divorce, “indecency” and “a matter,” and since “a matter” could refer to just about anything, this became the basis for the Hillelite “any cause” divorce.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{14} R. T. France, \textit{The Gospel of Matthew} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 716; Osborne, 703.
\textsuperscript{15} Instone-Brewer, \textit{Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible}, 85-132.
\textsuperscript{16} Instone-Brewer, \textit{Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible}, 111.
It is concerning this Hillelite position that the Pharisees question Jesus in v 3. “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?” Does Jesus agree with Hillel or Shammai?

_Jesus Denies the Foundation of the Pharisaic Position (vv 4-6)_

And He answered and said, “Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, 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 ‘? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” (Matt 19:4-6 NASB)

Rather than agree with either Hillel or Shammai, Jesus denies the very premise of their question. According to Köstenberger and Jones,

Jesus’ reply transcends the legalistic squabbles between those two rabbinic schools and goes to the very heart of the matter…. Not only does he stress the permanence of marriage as a divine rather than human institution, but he contends that divorce is fundamentally at odds with God’s purpose in creation.  

Jesus appeals to the creation narrative, taking a phrase from Gen 1:27 (or 5:2) and appending it to Gen 2:24. God is the one who made male and female. God is the one who instituted the marriage relationship when He commanded the man to leave his parents and be joined to his wife. And God is the one who declared that “the two shall become one flesh.”

The exact nature of this “one flesh” relationship has been a matter of some discussion. Paul applies this to the sexual union that occurs even with a prostitute (1 Cor 6:16).  

But this is also the language of family and tribal relationships in the Old Testament (Gen 29:14; 2 Sam 5:1). It is probably best to see the “one flesh” relationship of husband and wife as including their sexual union, but not limited to it. According to Wenham, it refers to a relationship “which endures whatever changes occur to the related individuals.”

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17 Andreas J. Köstenberger and David Jones, _God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation_ (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 228-229.
19 Craig S. Keener, _Matthew_ (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), 293.
Therefore, Jesus says that what God has joined, no man should separate. It has been noted that Jesus did not say it was impossible to separate what God has joined together, but that it should not be separated. Instone-Brewer states,

When Jesus says “let no one separate,” he is, in technical terms, using the imperative mood. Other possible meanings of the imperative are “should not” and “must not.” Sometimes it can have a very strong sense of being an order (“don’t!”), and other times it can indicate a much weaker tone – “please don’t do it!” But one thing the use of the imperative can never mean is “you cannot.” The phrase can’t be translated “it is impossible for you to separate” or “you are not able to separate” or “you cannot separate.” What it actually means, therefore, is that separation is certainly possible but that it is wrong or, at the very least, undesirable.  

Legal divorce can be obtained. Nevertheless, Wingerd, et al. are at least partially correct when they argue that there are aspects of the “one flesh” union that remain. Things are never quite the same for the divorced individual after the divorce as they were before the marriage took place.  

Jesus has stated in no uncertain terms that God’s original plan for marriage was permanence. As France correctly states, “The dispute between Shammai and Hillel over the grounds of divorce has been firmly set aside: there simply is no basis for divorce.”  

The Pharisees Raise Objections from Deuteronomy 24 (v 7)

They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY?" (Matt 19:7 NASB)

Faced with Jesus’ blanket disavowal of divorce, the Pharisees want to return the discussion to Deuteronomy 24. Didn’t Moses command divorce? Actually, the only command in Deut 24:1-4 is that a woman who is divorced by her first husband and subsequently remarries cannot under any circumstances ever remarry her first husband. The passage contains a complex protasis, consisting of eight steps, followed by a single apodosis.

1) First husband marries the wife
2) First husband finds some indecency in the wife
3) First husband divorces the wife

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22 Keener, And Marries Another, 41; Instone-Brewer, Divorce and Remarriage in the Church, 17.
4) Wife marries a second husband
5) Second husband dislikes the wife
6) Second husband divorces the wife
7) Alternatively, the second husband dies
8) First husband wants to remarry the wife

First of all, attention must be given to the reason for the woman’s first divorce. Block notes that, “While most interpreters try to establish a flaw in the woman that provoked this response, the clause actually exposes a flaw in the man.” She finds no grace in his eyes. Instead, he has found some indecency in her. Instone-Brewer states, “It is now impossible to decide what this referred to originally, but it is likely to be related to some matter of the cleanliness laws.” One thing cannot refer to is adultery since the penalty for adultery in the Old Testament was death (Lev 20:10; Deut 22:22). One clue to the meaning of is the fact that this phrase occurs one other time in the Bible, just one chapter earlier, in Deut 23:14. There it refers to the requirement to have a latrine outside the camp so that God might not see their . Adams suggests that “the idea of repulsiveness or repugnancy seems uppermost” and “the phrase is rather general and seems to cover anything and everything (in this case) a husband might deem repugnant.” Christensen suggests, “the interpretation ‘something indecent, obnoxious, or shameful’ is not far off the mark as an interpretive comment.”

Whatever the reason, the first husband divorces his wife. Contrary to the Pharisees, this is expressed as a statement of fact and not a command. Then she becomes another man’s wife. In time, he also divorces her. McConville states,

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26 Daniel I. Block, Deuteronomy (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 557.
27 Instone-Brewer, Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible, 10.
28 Köstenberger and Jones, God, Marriage, and Family, 224.
29 Adams, 63.
The second divorce is passed over quickly. No value judgment is implied about the second husband’s behaviour. However, the term used here is the same used of the man who makes an unjustified accusation in 22:13. It is an open question, therefore, whether the second husband’s action is justified.31

Following the termination of the second marriage, either by death or divorce, the first husband desires to remarry the woman. The only command in the passage is that this is not allowed.

Westbrook argues that the reason remarriage to the first husband is barred is financial. He suggests that there is a distinction between the end of the first marriage for some indecency and the end of the second by either “dislike” or death. The first husband has divorced his wife for cause and does not have to restore her dowry or make other payments. The second husband has divorced her without a legitimate cause and must make a financial settlement with the woman. The first husband is barred from remarrying her because then he would benefit financially twice and this would be an abomination.32

Westbrook’s reconstruction is far from obvious. There are no indications in the passage that the issue is financial. Rather, the reason given for prohibiting the remarriage to the first husband is that “she has been defiled.” Block suggests that the cause of the woman’s defilement is the first husband’s degrading behavior towards her (Deut 21:14).33 Köstenberger and Jones suggest that she is defiled by her second marriage, “perhaps indicating that illegitimate remarriage after divorce amounts to adultery.”34 MacArthur suggests that it was her improper divorce from the first husband which made the second marriage adulterous and resulted in her defilement.35 Christensen states that defilement “refers to the woman in relation to her first husband and not a general state brought about by her

31 McConville, 358.
32 Westbrook, 393-405; Instone-Brewer, Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible, 7; Heth, “Remarriage for Adultery or Desertion,” 64.
33 Block, 559.
34 Köstenberger and Jones, God, Marriage, and Family, 34.
35 MacArthur, The Divorce Dilemma, 9; MacArthur, Mathew 16-23, 168; Adams, 65.
remarriage.”\textsuperscript{36} Whatever the case, the only thing that is prohibited in Deut 24:1-4 is the remarriage of a wife to her first husband after an intervening marriage.

A couple of things are clear. Divorce was certainly permitted in the Old Testament. As Block states, “While the text provides no moral or theological justification for divorce, it recognizes that divorce was tolerated in ancient Israel as a legal reality. But legal recognition and moral justification are two different issues.”\textsuperscript{37} Likewise, Ellison states that, “From this Old Testament legislation it is to be noted that God did recognize divorce when it took place in Israel’s courts, even though the union was designed to be permanent. Moses spoke of the woman becoming ‘another man’s wife’ and of her husband as being her ‘former husband.’”\textsuperscript{38} Both divorce and remarriage are recognized in Deut 24 as legal realities. They are not endorsed or commanded, but they are recognized.

\textit{Jesus Dismisses These Objections (vv 8-9)}

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. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.” (Matt 19:8-9 NASB)

In v 8, Jesus corrects the Pharisees. Moses did not command divorce. He permitted it. According to Jesus, God’s creation ordinance supersedes the permission given by Moses. But that permission was given for one reason – hard hearts (σκληροκαρδία), or “stubbornness.”\textsuperscript{39} This is the exception for which Jesus allows divorce.

Instone-Brewer would like to define this term narrowly as a specific reference to Jer 4:4, which he sees as a summary of Jeremiah 3 where God charges Judah for their stubborn unfaithfulness to Him.

\textsuperscript{36} Christensen, 567.
\textsuperscript{37} Block, 561.
\textsuperscript{38} Ellison, 49.
\textsuperscript{39} William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, \textit{A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 930. Luz (490, note 32) describes σκληροκαρδία as “a biblical, especially wisdom, term that in general refers to the inner dimension of sin, particularly against God. It reflects an unwillingness to repent, being closed to God, stubbornness.”
Therefore, he argues that divorce is allowed in a case where one party stubbornly refuses to repent of adultery or other sin that is destroying the marriage.  

But it seems more appropriate to take the second person plural pronouns as having the same antecedent throughout this verse. Moses did not permit “you” to divorce “your” wives because of “their” hard hearts, but because of “your” hard hearts. The ones with the hard hearts are the ones who are initiating the divorces. Therefore, the stubbornness in view here is probably a more general rebellious attitude towards God. As France has said,

This familiar biblical term refers not so much to people’s attitude to on another (cruelty, neglect, or the like) as to their attitude to God, whose purpose and instructions they have set aside. It was the fact that divorce was taking place in defiance of God’s stated intention for marriage that made it necessary for Moses to make appropriate provision. But it should never have been so. The existence of divorce legislation is a pointer not to divine approval of divorce but to human sinfulness.  

So far the passage has been relatively clear. The Pharisees have been trying to embroil Jesus in a discussion of what legitimate grounds exist for divorce and Jesus has denied them all. He has expressed God’s original intention that marriage should be permanent and should not be separated by people. He acknowledges that Moses allowed divorce due to human stubbornness but He does not endorse it. But verse 9 is a crux. On the surface, Jesus appears to accept one valid reason for divorce after all. He appears to side ultimately with the school of Shammai in allowing divorce in the case of sexual immorality. This is, in fact, the majority view among modern interpreters. People who adopt this view argue that this exception was so well known that it is simply assumed in those passages which express Jesus’ opposition to divorce in more absolute terms (Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18; 1 Cor 7:10-11).  

But there are important reasons for concluding that is not the case. First, Jesus is in conflict with the Pharisees here, not in agreement. It makes no sense to see Jesus take the side of either Pharisaic party at this point. Second, Jesus has already completely rejected divorce in vv 4-8. If Jesus is now

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agreeing with the view of Shammai, then He Himself has argued against it up until this point of the passage, only to capitulate at the end. Third, the exception Jesus offers is for πορνεία, not for μοιχεία, which would be the normal word for adultery. The only place other than 5:32 and 19:9 (the two exception clauses) where Matthew uses the word πορνεία is 15:19, where it occurs in a list along with μοιχεία. This suggests that a different nuance is intended here.\textsuperscript{42} Fourth, the other sources of Jesus’ teaching on divorce (Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18; 1 Cor 7:10-11) present Him as rejecting it without an exception. If the exceptions in Matthew were clear, it would be possible to say that they are assumed in the other sources. But since Matthew’s account also shows Jesus rejecting divorce, the most consistent position is to understand all of these passages as categorically rejecting divorce.

What then should be made of the phrase μὴ ἐπὶ πορνείᾳ “except for immorality?” According to Witherington, πορνεία “refers in the first instance to prostitution and the various sorts of sexual aberrations that might be involved in frequenting prostitutes, and then more broadly to a variety of sexual sins. When it has a narrow or specific sense, it refers to incest, not adultery.”\textsuperscript{43} He argues that Jesus is making specific reference here to the case of Herod Antipas and Herodias, who had contracted an incestuous marriage the Jesus says should be dissolved.\textsuperscript{44}

Piper suggests that in this case πορνεία refers specifically to premarital sexual sin which occurred during the betrothal period. Within Jewish culture, breaking a betrothal required a divorce. Thus, in Matt 1:18-20, Joseph was considering divorcing Mary when she was found pregnant before they had come together and he is called righteous in doing so. According to Piper, “Since only Matthew had told this story, he needs to clarify that Jesus’ prohibition on divorce followed by remarriage did not

\textsuperscript{42} Piper, 313.
\textsuperscript{43} Witherington, 362.
\textsuperscript{44} Witherington, 359.
include a situation like Joseph and Mary’s presumed situation – fornication between betrothed couples.\textsuperscript{45}

Perhaps the best solution is offered by Hauck and Schulz in the \textit{Theological Dictionary of the New Testament}. They suggest that since divorcing an adulterous wife was practically required in Jewish culture,

By means of the exception in 5:32 Mt. is telling his Jewish Christian readers that if a man puts away his wife except for her infidelity, in which case he is compelled to do so by existing statutes, he is driving her into an adulterous relation should she remarry. In another version the point is the same in Mt. 19:9. In both verses \textit{πορνεία} refers to extra-marital intercourse on the part of the wife, which in practice is adultery…. The drift of the clauses, then, is not that the Christian husband, should his wife be unfaithful, is permitted to divorce her, but that if he is legally forced to do this he should not be open to criticism if by her conduct his wife has made the continuation of the marriage quite impossible.\textsuperscript{46}

In this case, the divorce is still wrong, but it is somebody else’s wrong.

Gibbs helpfully concludes,

Most importantly of all, Jesus is not acquiescing to the Pharisees’ terms by entering into a discussion about when and how it is “lawful” (19:3) for a husband to divorce his wife. He is not saying, “Well, you’ve asked a good question, and the answer is that there is really only one circumstance in which it is lawful, namely sexual unfaithfulness.” No, Jesus is saying this: do not divorce! God doesn’t want it. “‘I hate divorce,’ says Yahweh, the God of Israel’ (Mal 2:16). And if you do divorce, in virtually every circumstance that you can imagine, you are not doing what is “lawful.” Instead, you are committing adultery.\textsuperscript{47}

\textbf{The Disciples Express Their Struggle with Jesus’ Teaching (v 10)}

The disciples said to Him, "If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry." (Mat 19:10 NAU)

One of the biggest objections to the idea that Jesus simply adopts the view of Shammai is level of the disciples’ shock at the view He expressed. If He simply agrees with Shammai, they might consider

\textsuperscript{45} {Piper, 315.}
\textsuperscript{47} Jeffrey A. Gibbs, \textit{Matthew 11:2-20:34} (St. Louis: Concordia, 2010), 953.
this harsh but understandable. Their reaction suggests that Jesus is teaching them something radically different.

Commentators struggle to explain the disciples’ reaction by describing how Jesus’ view is both like, but unlike the view of Shammai. Keener states that “Jesus’ language is much stronger that that of the school of Shammai in calling the wrongful divorce so invalid that the consequent union would be adulterous.”\(^{48}\) Likewise, Instone-Brewer argues that,

He not only refused to allow ‘any matter’ divorces but declared that they were invalid, so that anyone remarrying after an ‘any matter’ divorce was committing adultery. In this opinion Jesus stood out from all other groups within Judaism. He sided with the Shammaites in their interpretation of ‘matter of indecency,’ and he sided with Qumran in their teaching on monogamy, but only Jesus declared that ‘any matter’ divorces were invalid.\(^{49}\)

Heth argues that Jesus differs from the Shammaite view in that Shammai taught that divorce was mandatory for unfaithfulness and Jesus encourages reconciliation and forgiveness.\(^{50}\)

None of these is particularly convincing. What seems most likely is that Jesus differed from Shammai, not just in degree, but by offering a radically different solution altogether.

**Jesus Reaffirms His Position and Challenges the Disciples to Accept It (vv 11-12)**

But He said to them, “Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother’s womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it.” (Matt 19:11-12 NASB)

Jesus’ disciples had expressed concern that if there was no back door to marriage, perhaps it was better not to marry. Jesus responds by affirming that celibacy is an acceptable state. But that is a special calling that is not for everyone. For most people, marriage, despite all of its challenges, is a God ordained and God blessed institution that should be entered with the conviction and commitment to make it last for a lifetime.

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\(^{48}\) Keener, *And Marries Another*, 40.

\(^{49}\) Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, 167.

\(^{50}\) Heth, “Remarriage for Adultery or Desertion,” 71. Also, Köstenberger and Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family*, 227.
Practical Considerations

This paper has advocated a position which allows for no legitimate divorce and no legitimate remarriage based on Matt 19:3-12. As Adams has stated, “divorce is a human institution.”\(^{51}\) It is recognized and permitted in the Bible, but never endorsed or approved. Sinful, hard hearted people are going to get divorces. Every divorce is the result of at least one sinful human being who refuses to abide by God’s standards for marriage. God does not like it.

Likewise, remarriage is recognized and permitted, but never endorsed or approved. Deut 24:1-4 makes it clear that these are real marriages which change the status of those who enter into them. But Jesus says that those who enter into these remarriages are committing an act of adultery.

But how does the church stand firm on these principles and at the same time fulfill its responsibility as a minister of grace to those whose lives have been damaged by sin. The church needs to be known for more than just condemning sin. It needs to be known for a positive message of God’s grace. The following are some suggestions.

First, to those who are contemplating first marriages, the church needs to teach positively the sanctity and permanence of Christian marriage. Marriage is a divine institution and God designed it for one man and one woman for life. What God has joined, nobody should separate. Couples need to enter marriage with a commitment to staying married and working through the difficulties that will inevitably come when two sinful human beings are joined.

Second, to married couples who are experiencing difficulty and considering divorce, the church needs to teach positively the message of reconciliation.\(^{52}\) As Adams has said, “divorce is never desirable, and (among Christians) it is never inevitable. Reconciliation … is always possible for believers under the

\(^{51}\) Adams, 27.
care and discipling of the church." While divorce is permitted and recognized, it is never required and should never be advocated as the preferred solution.

Third, for those already divorced and for whom reconciliation is no longer an option because their spouse has remarried, the church needs to proactively work to make it possible for them to live as singles. Remarriage should not be encouraged. Two questions that all ministers, regardless of their position on this question, should ask themselves are, 1) should I participate in a wedding that Jesus classified as an act of adultery? And 2) are there any weddings that based on my biblical convictions I will not do?

Fourth, for those who are already remarried, the church needs to provide acceptance and needs to encourage them to make these God honoring marriages. Repentance for past sins is appropriate and the church should offer forgiveness and restoration to those who are repentant without making them bear a continual burden of past failures. Forgiveness may not remove all consequences of past sin, but people need to be restored to fellowship with the church and encouraged to continue growing and living for God in whatever state they find themselves.

Lastly, towards those who have honestly studied the Scriptures and reached different conclusions and are living out the convictions which they have formed from the Bible, there needs to be a spirit of humility. These are difficult questions and godly people have reached different conclusions. Nobody should be asked to operate contrary to convictions duly formed by serious study of the Word of God.

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53 Adams, 31.
Bibliography


Matthew 19:3-12

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?" 4 And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, 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? 6 "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." 7 They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY?"

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. 9 "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery. "10 The disciples said to Him, "If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry." 11 But He said to them, "Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given. 12 "For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it."

13 And Pharisees came up to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any reason at all?"

14 But Jesus answered and said to them, "Because of the hardness of your heart, He who made them male and female said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh; so they are no longer two, but one flesh.' 15 "Therefore what God joined together, do not separate."

Mark 10:2-12

2 Some Pharisees came up to Jesus, testing Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife. 3 And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, 4 and said, 'FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH;' so they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

5 But Jesus answered and said to them, "Because of the hardness of heart which He wrote you this commandment. 6 "But from the beginning of creation, God MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE. 7 "FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH; so they are no longer two, but one flesh. 8 "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." 10 In the house the disciples began questioning Him about this again. 11 And He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; 12 and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery."

Luke 16:18

18 "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery."

1 Corinthians 7:10-11

10 But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband 11 (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.

Genesis 1:24

24 For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4

1 "When a man takes a wife and marries her, and if it so happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house, 2 and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's wife, 3 and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, 4 then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance.

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