

Marriage, Divorce, & Remarriage

Lesson 3

DIVORCE – A Testament To Someone's Failure

Introduction

For various reasons, man has consistently done something...even not long after his creation. He has routinely "set aside the commands of God for the sake of his own traditions" (cp. Mt. 15:6). Despite knowing and understanding God's clear instructions on a matter, man has his own ideas about how those things ought to be. Eventually, he relegates God's wisdom to "second class status" behind his own, and he does what he wants to do regardless of what his Maker has decreed (cp. Rom. 10:3; 1 Cor. 2:12-14).

Marriage is not immune from this mindset. We have already established why God instituted this most important of domestic relationships and how marital partners are to conduct themselves. Yet, man demonstrates his unwillingness at times to be content with what God has ordained about marriage. Either the husband or the wife, or even both, begin to display conduct that is detrimental to their relationship and to the happiness God wants for them. "One thing leads to another" and divorce ends their happiness.

Divorce is indeed a testament to failure. Even if divorce is sought and obtained for the reason the Lord sanctions, *somebody still failed*. It is as glaring as if we put up a statue in the middle of the town square to commemorate all the downfalls of the town's worst failure. Later generations could still pass by, mocking and ridiculing "*The Great Underachiever*" (cp. Lk. 14:28-29). Divorce leaves behind such a "permanent" reminder.

For as much happiness as marriage is to bring to a couple, divorce brings even a greater amount of heartache.

Divorce Under The Old Testament

Deut. 24:1-4

Even before the children of Israel entered their promised home, it is apparent they were already divorcing contrary to God's original marriage law, as indicated by this passage. It is also important to understand because it plays a major part in Jesus' later discussions with the Jews, as revealed in Mt. 19 and Mk. 10.

This provision in the Law was attempting to regulate sinful behavior already present...it was not giving license to future divorce for any cause at all. Just because God anticipates undesirable situations and tries to regulate them through His word does not mean He approves of the sinful behavior (cp. 1 Jn. 2:1-2).

- 1) Be able to identify the "conditional" (*the "if" part of the proposition*) as well as the "conclusion" (*the "then" part of the proposition*) sections of this passage. [*This is important.*]

Marriage, Divorce, & Remarriage

Lesson 3

- 2) What did this passage expressly forbid? (v. 4) What was ***not*** expressly forbidden? (v. 2)

- 3) What was it that defiled the woman? How do we know it wasn't her 2nd divorce? (v. 3)

- 4) What do you think is meant in v. 1 by the phrase "some indecency?" [NASV] As a comparison, consider Deut. 23:14. Are we able to say with any certainty what this "indecency" was? (cp. Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:13-27)

- 5) ***Thought question:*** why did God put this provision in the Law? In your answer, consider Mt. 19:7-8 and Mk. 10:3-5.

- 6) Obviously, from Jesus' own words in Mt. 19 & Mk. 10, how does this passage relate to marriage as found in Gen. 2?

Ezra 9-10

Ezra led the 2nd return back from Babylonian captivity around 458 B.C. Coming back some 80 years after Zerubbabel led the initial return to rebuild the temple, Ezra's task was to "rebuild the spiritual infrastructure." Ezra "set his heart" to know, practice, and then teach the Law to the "ignorant" Jewish exiles (7:8-10, 25).

As evidenced by these 2 chapters, "old sins" came back and Ezra was forced to deal with them.

- 7) What had the exiles failed to do? (9:1-2a) Who had been foremost in this sin? (9:2b) Where was this originally addressed in the Law? [Notice Ezra's prayer of confession – 9:6-15]

Marriage, Divorce, & Remarriage

Lesson 3

- 8) For reconciliation with God to occur, what had to happen? (10:1-4) How did they determine to work this out? (10:9-14, 16-17) Was there any opposition to this? (10:15)
- 9) **Thought question:** how hard do you think this was going to be? (10:44) What could have been emotionally argued, and would it have been a valid argument to make? Do you see any relation at all in situations like this to the demands of repentance? *[Important for later discussions]*
- 10) Why is this passage an appropriate one to consider when faced with modern-day unlawful marriages? What does it teach about priorities in life and our relationship with God? (cp. Mt. 19:12)

Mal. 2:10-16

Malachi prophesied around 440 to 430 B.C. He is the final O.T. prophetic spokesman, and his prophecy correlates with Nehemiah's book about the 3rd return from Babylonian captivity [445 B.C.]. Once again, the exiles showed themselves eager to return to prior sins. It had only been 13 years since Ezra dealt with a problem when it resurfaced and forced Malachi to address it again.

- 11) What was the problem as recorded in this passage? (v. 10) How had they accomplished this? (v. 11) What was the judgment pronounced upon the guilty? (v. 12)
- 12) What else had their actions done? (v. 13a) Whose tears do you think are mentioned? Did this have any affect on the worship of the exiles? (v. 13b)

Marriage, Divorce, & Remarriage

Lesson 3

- 13) Would you agree these Jewish exiles were in denial? (v. 14a) How does the prophet address this "denial?" (v. 14b) Principle → what does this verse set forth for all marriages for all time?
- 14) Mal. 2:15a is a challenging verse because of the various translations. What do you think is its interpretation? Mal. 2:15b is somewhat "easier"...what do you think is being discussed?
- 15) What feelings of God are mentioned in v. 16? What bearing should this have had on the problem faced by Malachi (*and Ezra*)? Does it have any impact on modern-day marriages?

Divorce In The New Testament

Mt. 5:31-32

In this section of Jesus' *Sermon On The Mount* (5:21-48), the Lord is not correcting Moses, as many believe when they read all the "You have heard it said...but I say unto you..." statements. Jesus is instead correcting skewed Jewish interpretations of the Law. He had just previously defended the importance of the Law (5:17-19). The problem was "shallow righteousness" as taught and practiced by the Jews...namely, the Pharisees (5:20).

- 16) To what passage does Jesus refer in v. 31? To this Jewish thinking that Jesus addressed, divorce appeared to be "okay" (*allowed*) as long as what happened? (v. 31)
- 17) How does Jesus emphasize God's original marriage law? (v. 32a) Would you agree that Jesus actually states here what Deut. 24 only implied?

Marriage, Divorce, & Remarriage

Lesson 3

- 18) When Jesus says an unlawful divorce “makes her commit adultery,” what is assumed to occur or happen? What does this teach or remind us about “stumbling blocks?”
- 19) **Thought question:** why wouldn't a lawful divorce “make her commit adultery?”
- 20) Who else is addressed in v. 32b? What are we to conclude about put away people and remarriage?

Mt. 19:3-9 / Mk. 10:2-12

There may not be any more familiar N.T. texts dealing with M/D/R than these two passages. The Lord's teaching recorded here arose out of yet another attempt by the Pharisees to discredit Him and try to set Him at odds with Moses. This one came while He was in Perea (Mt. 19:1), not long before His final entry into Jerusalem to suffer at the hands of these very opponents (Mt. 22).

- 21) What was the real reason for the Pharisees questioning Jesus? (Mt. 19:3; Mk. 10:2) How does the Pharisees' question differ between the 2 inspired gospel writers? What was their basic question?
- 22) How does Jesus initially respond and what passages does He cite? (Mt. 19:4-6; Mk. 10:5-9) What is His conclusion? (Mt. 19:6; Mk. 10:8-9) **Principle** → why is “at the beginning” so important? (Mt. 19:4, 8; Mk. 10:6)

Marriage, Divorce, & Remarriage

Lesson 3

- 23) According to Matthew's account, what "follow-up question" did the Pharisees pose? (Mt. 19:7)
What "correction" does Jesus make re: their question? (Mt. 19:8) Why does "hardness" always present a problem with some who try to follow God's will? (cp. Heb. 3:12-15)
- 24) What is the "rule" re: divorce as stated by Jesus? (Mt. 19:9; Mk. 10:11-12) Has this always been the rule? How does Matthew's account differ from Mark's record on this point?
- 25) Though not explicitly stated, what is the implication re: one who puts away a spouse who has been unfaithful? (Mt. 19:9)

Lk. 16:18

- 26) Who is addressed in the first part of this verse? How does this harmonize with Mark's record?
- 27) Who is addressed in the second part of this verse? What is taught about a "put away" person?

Mk. 10:29-30 / Lk. 18:29-30

These passages are important to include and consider because some brethren currently use them to teach another allowable cause for divorce...a divorce "for the sake of the kingdom of God."

- 28) What is the context? (Mk. 10:17-27; Lk. 18:18-27)
- 29) Can these verses be properly used when discussing M/D/R? If so, what *kind* of wife would have to be left "for the gospel's sake?"

Marriage, Divorce, & Remarriage

Lesson 3

Rom. 7:1-4

In this section of Paul's epistle to the Roman Christians, the apostle is trying to cement the idea that Jewish disciples were free to be "married to Christ" because their first husband (*i.e. the Law*) had died. To illustrate, he uses the imagery of physical marriage. In this way, this passage is much like the great marriage text of **Eph. 5:22-33**.

- 30) How long does law have jurisdiction over a person? (v. 1) How does this apply to the marriage relationship? (v. 2) What "law" is under discussion in v. 2? **Thought question:** how does the truth stated in **Mt. 22:23-30** reinforce what is taught here?

- 31) What two scenarios are presented in v. 3? What is the one thing that makes the difference?

- 32) **Principle** → based upon v. 3, what real possibility can be found in a marriage?
[Important to recognize & understand when considering prevalent false doctrines on M/D/R]

- 33) Though not stated, what **kind** of divorce is under consideration in v. 3? Be able to relate it back to what Jesus said in **Mt. 19**.

- 34) As a way to illustrate the teaching in **Rom. 7:1-4**, consider **Mk. 6:14-29**.
 - a) What did Herod think of Jesus? (vv. 14-16)

 - b) What had happened to John? (vv. 17-18)

 - c) On what "law" did John base his teaching?

Marriage, Divorce, & Remarriage

Lesson 3

- d) How could Herodias be “Philip’s wife” and be married to Herod at the same time?

- e) How do vv. 19-29 remind us of the high cost of preaching the truth?

1 Cor. 7:10-11

This section of Paul’s epistle to the Corinthian Christians began his answers to questions the brethren had previously submitted to him (7:1). When considering the overall teaching of this chapter, it is good to remember its thematic verse...v. 26. There was some type of “distress” that troubled them. The overall truths Paul teaches are the same whether a distress is present or not. However, some of his statements are to be viewed in light of this “distress.”

- 35) Who does Paul address? (v. 10a) How does he emphasize what he is about to say? (cp. 4:17; 7:17; 14:37)

- 36) What are his instructions? (vv. 10b-11) *Note:* many translations have most of v. 11 in parentheses to indicate this is not the main thought. If we view this section as some sort of “exception,” what is the rule as taught by Paul if we read vv. 10-11 without this “parenthetical” section? How does it harmonize with what Jesus taught in Mt. 19? Do you see the structure of 1 Cor. 7:10-11 as similar to 1 Jn. 2:1-2 in any way?

- 37) Paul begins v. 12 by stating, “*But to the rest...*” and addresses believers who are married to unbelievers. Given this, is there any way to determine who he addresses in vv. 10-11?

- 38) What do you think “depart” or “leave” means in v. 10? (cp. Mt. 19:6)

Marriage, Divorce, & Remarriage

Lesson 3

- 39) Are we able to determine what *kind* of divorce is under consideration in these verses?
- 40) This passage directly contradicts the "Mental Divorce" doctrine. When an unscriptural divorce has taken place, what adjective does Paul use to describe the spouse who put away a mate? (v. 11a)
- 41) "Mental Divorce" advocates teach when one has been put away unscripturally, he/she can later "mentally" put away the previous spouse after fornication or a remarriage has occurred. What this really boils down to is "waiting them out" until they commit either fornication or adultery. How does Paul's teaching in 1 Cor. 7:10-11 refute this?
- 42) Some teach these verses give an individual 2 equal options, especially if one believes it is acceptable to divorce as long as you do not remarry. Do you think this passage supports such a view? If not, how do we explain Paul's words, "...let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband?"