

REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

MATTHEW 19:6 KJV



SERMON & PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

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REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

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Sermon

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www.ReasonTogether.Church

Aloha.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

Our invitation is simple: Bring your questions. Open your Bible. Let us Reason Together the Word of God.

Today we are opening the Bible to a subject that is seldom discussed without someone being wounded. Divorce.

Remarriage.

The covenant God designed.

The sin that sometimes destroys it.

The grace that meets people in the wreckage.

Some of you are happily married.

Some of you are holding a marriage together with prayer, patience and tears.

Some of you were divorced against your will.

Some of you made choices you now regret.

Some of you remarried and have wondered whether God still sees you only through the worst chapter of your past.

Some of you were children when your home divided, and part of you is still standing in that doorway.

This message is not an invitation to examine somebody else's divorce.

It is an invitation to place our own convictions, wounds and decisions beneath the Word of God.

Before we begin, let us pray.

Our Heavenly Father, You established marriage and You know every marriage represented here. You know the homes filled with joy. You know the homes filled with quiet pain. You know who has been faithful, who has been betrayed, who is afraid and who needs to repent. Guard us from careless words. Give us courage to tell the truth, compassion to protect the wounded and humility to obey Your Word. Draw every heart toward Jesus Christ. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Our primary passages are Matthew 19:3-9 and 1 Corinthians 7:10-15.

Matthew 19 begins with a question from the Pharisees.

“The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?”

Jesus answered, “Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female,”

“And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?”

“Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

They asked Him why Moses commanded a writing of divorcement.

Jesus answered, “Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.”

Then He said, “And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery.”

First Corinthians 7 adds another painful circumstance.

Paul writes, “But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart.”

“A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.”

We do not pass an offering plate at Reason Together Church.

Guests are not expected to give. Members of another church should normally give through their home church. If God leads you to support this ministry, a giving box is available in the back.

If you are visiting, we invite you to complete a guest card with only your first name and email address.

After the service, please join us in the Reason Together Cafe, where COFFEE reminds us that Christ Offers Forgiveness For Everyone Everywhere.

Parents may ask about the Keiki Kids Center.

Anyone who wants private prayer or conversation may meet with us afterward in the Pastor's Study on the second floor.

Now let us open our Bibles and reason together.

The Pharisees began with divorce.

Jesus began with marriage.

That order matters.

We cannot understand what divorce breaks until we understand what marriage joins.

Genesis 2:18 says, “And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.”

God formed the woman and brought her unto the man.

Adam said, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh.”

Then Scripture declares, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”

Marriage did not begin in a courthouse.

It did not begin in a legislature.

It did not begin in a church tradition.

Marriage began with God.

One man.

One woman.

Leaving.

Cleaving.

Becoming one flesh.

Malachi 2:14 calls her “thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant.”

Marriage is not merely a contract that lasts while both people remain satisfied.

It is a covenant made before God.

A contract asks what each party must provide.

A covenant binds the person who made the promise.

That does not mean marriage has no legal responsibilities.

It means those responsibilities rest inside something sacred.

Husband and wife do not simply share a house.

They share life.

They share bodies, burdens, resources, family and future.

Jesus says, “They are no more twain, but one flesh.”

Then He says, “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

That is the design.

It is strong.

It is beautiful.

It is meant to endure.

But the Bible never asks us to pretend that Genesis 3 did not happen.

Sin entered the world.

Shame entered.

Blame entered.

Self-protection entered.

Hardness entered.

And hardness of heart entered marriage.

The Pharisees asked why Moses allowed a certificate of divorce.

Jesus answered, “Because of the hardness of your hearts.”

He did not say divorce was the design.

He said Moses regulated what hard hearts were doing.

Deuteronomy 24 does not command a husband to divorce his wife.

It describes a case in which a man gives a writing of divorcement, the woman leaves and she becomes another man's wife.

The command comes later.

After the intervening marriage ends, the first husband may not take her back.

The law restrained a man from treating a woman as property he could dismiss and later reclaim.

The certificate publicly recognized that the marriage had ended.

But paper did not turn treachery into righteousness.

A divorce can be legally valid and morally sinful.

A court can record that a marriage ended without determining who broke faith.

That brings us to Malachi.

The men of Judah were dealing treacherously with the wives of their youth.

They came to worship, but God rejected their offerings.

They asked why.

Malachi answered, "Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously."

The KJV continues, "For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away."

We often shorten that to three words.

God hates divorce.

There is truth in that statement.

God hates covenant treachery.

He hates what selfish divorce does to a faithful spouse.

He hates the lies that often prepare the way for it.

He hates what it does to children.

He hates the violence of covering one's garment with wrong.

But Malachi must never be used to say that God hates the person who was abandoned.

The passage is addressed to the one dealing treacherously, not to the one suffering the treachery.

If your spouse discarded you, Malachi is not evidence that God has turned against you.

It is evidence that God saw what happened.

He witnessed the covenant.

He witnessed the betrayal.

He did not confuse the person who broke faith with the person who was brokenhearted.

Every divorce grows out of a world damaged by sin.

But that does not mean both spouses are always equally responsible.

No husband is perfect.

No wife is perfect.

Every marriage requires confession and forgiveness.

Yet ordinary imperfection does not make adultery morally equal to irritation.

It does not make violence equal to an impatient word.

It does not make abandonment equal to failing to communicate perfectly.

Sometimes people say, “There are always two sides.”

There may be two perspectives.

There are not always two equal causes.

A marriage may contain two imperfect people without containing two equally guilty people.

Now listen carefully to the Pharisees' question.

They did not merely ask, “Is divorce ever permitted?”

They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?”

For every cause.

In the debate of their day, some men claimed broad authority to dismiss a wife for nearly any displeasure.

The certificate became a way to make selfishness look respectable.

Jesus refused their assumption.

He took them past their preferred interpretation.

He took them back to creation.

“Have ye not read?”

That question still confronts us.

Have we read the whole counsel of God?

Or have we collected the verse that serves the decision we already want to make?

The Pharisees wanted to know how much permission a man possessed.

Jesus reminded them that marriage belongs to God.

The question is not merely, “Can I find a way out?”

The question is, “What has God joined, and what does faithfulness require?”

If you are married and quietly building a case against your spouse because you are bored, disappointed or attracted to somebody else, stop.

Do not call temptation love.

Do not call selfishness peace.

Do not call secrecy privacy.

Do not ask God to bless what He has forbidden.

Ordinary unhappiness is not Biblical grounds for divorce.

Growing apart is not an irreversible force of nature.

Another person's attention is not God's permission.

Before you break the covenant, tell the truth.

Ask for help.

Confess your part.

Seek counseling.

Pray together if your spouse will pray.

Fight the sin that is attacking the marriage instead of fighting the person to whom you made the promise.

Jesus upheld the covenant.

But Jesus also stated an exception.

Matthew 19:9 says, "Except it be for fornication."

The Greek word is porneia, a broad word for sexual immorality.

At its clearest, it includes adultery and other physical sexual betrayal.

Jesus did not invent a loophole for selfishness.

He recognized that sexual immorality can violate the one-flesh covenant at its center.

Notice what Jesus did not say.

He did not say the faithful spouse must divorce.

Permission is not commandment.

Some marriages survive adultery through genuine repentance, patient work and extraordinary grace.

That restoration can display the mercy of God.

But reconciliation cannot be manufactured by the betrayed spouse alone.

An apology is not repentance merely because tears accompany it.

Repentance tells the truth.

Repentance ends the affair.

Repentance accepts accountability.

Repentance stops blaming the wounded spouse for the choice to betray.

Repentance accepts consequences.

Repentance demonstrates change over time.

Forgiveness may be offered freely.

Trust must be rebuilt truthfully.

No pastor should demand that a betrayed spouse restore full trust before the unfaithful spouse has become trustworthy.

We also must not stretch the exception until every sexual struggle becomes a ground for divorce.

Jesus warns that lust is adultery in the heart.

That exposes the guilt of our hearts.

It does not mean that one sinful glance automatically dissolves a marriage.

Persistent pornography, online sexual relationships and repeated sexual deception can become grave covenant betrayal.

Those situations require truth and careful judgment.

They must not be minimized.

They also must not be decided by a slogan.

Then Paul addresses another circumstance.

What happens when one spouse leaves?

First Corinthians 7 first speaks to married believers.

Paul says the wife is not to depart from her husband, and the husband is not to put away his wife.

If a spouse wrongfully departs, Paul says that person should “remain unmarried, or be reconciled.”

The person who abandons the covenant is not granted permission to leave simply to pursue another marriage.

Then Paul speaks to a believer married to an unbeliever.

If the unbelieving spouse is pleased to dwell with the believer, the believer must not leave.

Becoming a Christian does not give someone permission to discard an unsaved spouse.

The believer's presence can bring holy influence into the home.

But Paul knows the believer cannot control the other person's will.

“But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart.”

Those words are painful because they acknowledge a limit.

One person can repent.

One person can forgive.

One person can seek peace.

One person cannot perform both sides of a covenant.

Paul says, “A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases.”

A brother or a sister.

The protection applies to the abandoned husband and the abandoned wife.

The Christian is not commanded to chase the departing spouse forever.

The Christian is not assigned the unbeliever's guilt.

The Christian is not required to force a false appearance of peace.

“God hath called us to peace.”

This does not mean that every uncomfortable home may be abandoned in the name of peace.

Paul has just commanded believers to honor their marriages.

It means the faithful spouse is not responsible for controlling what cannot be controlled.

Perhaps this is your story.

You did not leave.

You did not cheat.

You did not ask for the divorce.

You prayed.

You tried.

You asked for counseling.

Your spouse refused.

Then the papers arrived.

Maybe you had to answer those papers to protect your children, your home or your legal rights.

Perhaps your name appears on the final documents.

That does not prove you destroyed the marriage.

The person who filed the final paper is not always the person who broke the covenant.

God is not confused by the courthouse record.

He knows who acted treacherously.

He knows who sought peace.

He knows who was willing to remain.

He knows who was left.

You cannot confess another person's sin.

You cannot repent for another person.

You cannot force another person to honor a covenant.

You do not carry guilt merely because your spouse chose divorce.

Now someone may ask, “What if the spouse who leaves says he is a Christian?”

First Corinthians 7:15 specifically mentions an unbeliever.

A Christian profession deserves to be taken seriously.

The church should call the departing spouse to repentance.

Matthew 18 gives a process of personal confrontation, witnesses and finally the church.

The purpose is restoration, not humiliation.

But a profession of faith cannot become a weapon.

Someone cannot abandon a faithful spouse, refuse every appeal from Scripture, reject the church's correction and then use the word Christian to keep the abandoned spouse suspended forever.

Jesus says that the person who refuses to hear the church is finally to be regarded “as an heathen man and a publican.”

That conclusion must never be reached quickly.

It requires patience, evidence and orderly care.

But the church must not pretend that persistent rebellion is obedience because the rebel knows Christian vocabulary.

There is another question many sermons avoid.

What about abuse?

The Bible never commands a spouse to remain within reach of violence.

Physical assault is sin.

Sexual coercion is sin.

Threatening children is sin.

Controlling money to create helplessness can be sin.

Using Scripture to terrify and dominate a spouse is sin.

If you or your children are in immediate danger, seek safety.

Call law enforcement when a crime has occurred or danger is present.

Tell trustworthy people the truth.

Seeking protection is not a failure to forgive.

Reporting a crime is not an attack upon marriage.

The violent person attacked the marriage when violence entered the home.

Separation, divorce and remarriage remain distinct questions.

Immediate separation may be necessary before every theological question has been resolved.

Safety can be established while pastors and mature believers examine what responsibilities remain.

The Bible clearly names sexual immorality and the departure of an unbeliever.

It does not contain a sentence saying, “Every form of abuse is automatically grounds for remarriage.”

We should not claim more than the text says.

Yet we must ask whether persistent violence and total rejection of marital obligations have become a form of willful abandonment.

A person may leave the covenant while remaining in the building.

That is a serious conclusion requiring careful evidence, church discipline where possible and concern for safety throughout.

It must never become a casual category for ordinary marital conflict.

It also must never become an excuse for the church to ignore terror inside a home.

Mental illness presents a different kind of difficulty.

Depression, trauma, dementia or serious psychiatric illness can change behavior and place enormous pressure upon a family.

Illness is not automatically rebellion.

Incapacity is not the same as refusal.

Compassion does not require ignoring danger, but we must not call sickness covenant-breaking without careful understanding.

Addiction also demands careful judgment.

Alcohol, drugs, gambling or pornography may destroy finances, safety, intimacy and trust.

A struggling spouse who tells the truth, seeks treatment and accepts accountability is different from a spouse who protects the addiction and sacrifices the family to it.

The issue is not the label alone.

The issue includes conduct, danger, repentance and whether the marriage's basic obligations have been willfully abandoned.

Now we reach remarriage.

Faithful Christians have reached different conclusions.

Some believe that no divorced person may remarry while the former spouse lives.

They point to Mark 10, Luke 16, Romans 7 and 1 Corinthians 7:39.

Some permit divorce in certain cases but do not permit remarriage.

Others conclude that a Biblically valid divorce brings freedom to remarry in the Lord.

We should not caricature people who read these passages differently.

They are trying to honor serious words spoken by Jesus.

But I believe the third conclusion best accounts for the whole Biblical record.

Matthew gives a genuine exception.

Paul says the abandoned believer is not under bondage.

In the ancient world, desertion could itself effect the dissolution of the marriage.

Paul later asks, "Art thou loosed from a wife?" and then says, "But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned."

That passage has interpretive questions of its own, but it belongs in the discussion.

Deuteronomy 24 also assumes that divorce carried the practical ability to marry another.

Therefore, when sexual immorality or irremediable abandonment has established a valid divorce, the innocent spouse may remarry in the Lord.

That freedom should not be declared impulsively.

The facts should be examined.

Reconciliation should remain open while it is truthful, safe and genuinely possible.

Healing should not be rushed.

Children and continuing obligations must be considered.

But the covenant-breaker's sin does not grant the covenant-breaker control over the innocent spouse's entire future.

The one who wrongly departed was told to remain unmarried or be reconciled.

We should not automatically place that same restriction upon the person who was left.

Suppose the departing spouse later marries another person.

At that point, return to the first marriage may no longer be Biblically possible.

Deuteronomy 24 forbids return after an intervening marriage.

The new sexual union also makes the betrayal unmistakable.

The abandoned spouse should not be condemned to wait for what Scripture no longer permits to be reconstructed.

Now consider the person who divorced and remarried without Biblical grounds.

What should that person do?

The wrong beginning should not be renamed righteousness.

Sin should be confessed.

Where apology and restitution are possible, they should be considered wisely.

Financial and parental obligations from the first family must be honored.

But another divorce is ordinarily not the remedy.

The present marriage is now a real marriage with present responsibilities.

Repentance does not mean breaking another home to prove that breaking the first home was wrong.

Honor the spouse you now have.

Become faithful where you now stand.

Do not repeat the pattern.

Care for every child who depends upon you.

Tell the truth about the past without allowing the past to become permission for present unfaithfulness.

What if the divorce occurred before salvation?

Conversion does not erase history or every earthly consequence.

But conversion truly cleanses the sinner.

First Corinthians 6 says, “And such were some of you.”

Then it says, “But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

The church must not create a list on which Christ forgives adultery, pride, greed, lying and cruelty but cannot forgive divorce.

Divorce is serious.

Divorce is not stronger than the blood of Jesus.

What about church leadership?

First Timothy and Titus require an overseer to be “the husband of one wife.”

That qualification must not be ignored.

Neither should it be reduced to a box asking whether the candidate ever experienced a divorce.

The church should ask what happened.

Who broke faith?

Was the divorce before conversion?

Was the person faithful?

Has repentance been demonstrated?

Does the present household display Christian character?

Are children and former dependents treated responsibly?

Is the man now plainly a one-woman man?

Salvation, church membership, Christian service and pastoral qualification are related questions, but they are not identical questions.

Wisdom requires facts, character and time.

And what about the children?

Children often become the quiet casualties of adult warfare.

Do not make a child carry messages between homes.

Do not interrogate a child after every visit.

Do not buy loyalty.

Do not tell children sexual details they are not prepared to carry.

Do not require them to hate the other parent in order to prove that they love you.

If contact is safe, do not destroy a child's relationship with the other parent out of bitterness.

If contact is unsafe, protect the child even when protection is misunderstood.

Pay what you owe.

Keep your promises.

Show up when you said you would show up.

Divorce may end a marriage, but it does not end responsible parenthood.

The church also has responsibilities.

We must defend marriage before the papers are filed.

We must teach young people that covenant matters.

We must help struggling couples before resentment hardens.

We must confront adultery instead of managing appearances.

We must protect the vulnerable instead of protecting the reputation of the powerful.

We must investigate serious accusations fairly.

Taking an allegation seriously does not require declaring guilt without evidence.

Seeking evidence does not require leaving someone in danger.

We must refuse gossip.

We must refuse retaliation.

We must refuse to use confidentiality as a cover for crime.

And when someone has been abandoned by a spouse, the church must not abandon that person too.

The single parent may need practical help.

The divorced person may need a place at the table.

The child may need stable Christian adults.

The remarried couple may need discipleship rather than permanent suspicion.

Truth and mercy are not enemies.

Jesus embodies both.

Perhaps you are married and your marriage is strained, but the covenant has not been destroyed.

Do not use this sermon to search for an exception.

Use it to search your own heart.

Speak honestly with your spouse.

Ask for help.

Forgive what should be forgiven.

Confess what should be confessed.

Begin doing the next faithful thing.

Perhaps you are committing adultery or preparing to leave for another person.

Stop.

The excitement of secrecy is not evidence of God's blessing.

You are not discovering your true life.

You are preparing grief for people who trusted you.

End the relationship.

Tell the truth.

Repent before more damage is done.

Perhaps you caused a divorce years ago.

You cannot rewrite the past.

You can stop defending it.

You can confess your sin to God.

You can make appropriate amends without intruding upon the life of someone who has moved forward.

You can become faithful today.

Perhaps you were abandoned.

Hear this clearly.

You are not guilty merely because somebody divorced you.

God does not confuse the one who broke the covenant with the one who grieved its breaking.

Your life is not over.

Your usefulness to God is not over.

Your identity is not “divorced.”

If there are sins of your own to confess, confess them.

But do not confess guilt that belongs to somebody else.

Perhaps you are in danger.

Please do not leave here believing that faith requires silence.

Tell someone trustworthy today.

Protect the children.

Seek lawful help.

We will pray with you and help you take the next safe step.

Perhaps you are already remarried.

Honor the covenant you now have.

Do not compare your present spouse with a romanticized past.

Do not allow guilt to become an excuse for distance.

Let grace make you more faithful, not less serious about marriage.

There is one more marriage Scripture asks us to see.
Ephesians 5 says human marriage points toward Christ and the church.
Every human husband fails to reflect Christ perfectly.
Every human wife fails to reflect the church perfectly.
Some marriages become beautiful testimonies of patient faithfulness.
Some are restored after terrible wounds.
Some end through death.
Some are destroyed by sin.
But Jesus Christ is the faithful Bridegroom.
He never deals treacherously with His bride.
He never abandons those He has redeemed.
He never violates His promise.
He does not conceal our sin in order to preserve an appearance.
He exposes sin so He may forgive, cleanse and transform the sinner.
No marital record can save us.
A person may remain married for fifty years and still be lost without Christ.
A person may carry the shame of divorce and be completely justified through faith in Christ.
All have sinned.
Jesus took our sin upon Himself.
He died upon the cross.
He was buried.
He rose again the third day.
He offers forgiveness and eternal life to everyone who repents and believes.
If you have never trusted Jesus Christ, do not wait until your life looks repaired.
Come to Him with the truth.
Come with the adultery.
Come with the anger.
Come with the abandonment.
Come with the grief.
Come with the history you cannot undo.
Call upon the Lord and be saved.
Let us pray.

Our Heavenly Father, thank You for designing marriage and for remaining faithful even when we have not been faithful. Strengthen marriages that are weak. Expose adultery and deception before they cause greater destruction. Bring true repentance where covenants have been violated. Protect spouses and children who are in danger. Comfort those who were abandoned. Free them from guilt that is not theirs. Give wisdom to those considering separation, divorce or remarriage. Teach Your church to defend marriage without abandoning the wounded. Thank You that the blood of Jesus cleanses every sinner who comes to Him in repentance and faith. Help us walk in truth, mercy and obedience. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Marriage must be honored.

Sin must be named.

The vulnerable must be protected.

The guilty must repent.

The abandoned must not be required to carry guilt that is not theirs.

The remarried must become faithful where they now stand.

And every one of us must depend upon the grace of Jesus Christ.

If you need prayer or private conversation, you are welcome to meet with us in the Pastor's Study after the service.

Please join us in the Reason Together Cafe and continue the conversation with patience, honesty and grace.

Aloha Nui Loa.

REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

Biblical Commentary

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

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Primary passages: Genesis 2:18-24; Deuteronomy 24:1-4; Malachi 2:10-16; Matthew 19:1-12; 1 Corinthians 7:10-15

Commentary Purpose

This commentary asks what the Bible teaches about divorce and remarriage without reducing the answer to either condemnation or permission. Scripture presents marriage as God's lifelong design. Scripture also addresses sexual betrayal, abandonment and situations in which one spouse cannot preserve the covenant alone. The commentary therefore distinguishes God's design, the sin that breaks marriage, the legal act of divorce and the responsibilities that follow.

The central pastoral conclusion is that a person who is divorced against his or her will does not automatically share the guilt of the spouse who caused the divorce. Legal status does not settle moral responsibility. The freedom to remarry requires further Biblical examination, but the abandoned spouse must not be treated as though receiving divorce papers were itself an act of covenant-breaking.

Commentary in Brief

God formed marriage as a one-flesh covenant between one man and one woman. Moses regulated divorce because human hearts became hard, but regulation never replaced the creation design. Jesus rejected divorce “for every cause,” returned His hearers to Genesis and identified sexual immorality as an exception. Paul prohibited believers from abandoning willing spouses but said that when an unbeliever departs, the believer is not under bondage.

The best synthesis is that sexual immorality and irremediable abandonment can provide grounds for divorce and may free the innocent spouse to remarry in the Lord. Severe abuse requires immediate safety and may become a form of covenantal abandonment, but Scripture does not give a simple formula for every abusive or neglectful situation. Separation, divorce and remarriage must be considered separately.

Wrongful divorce and remarriage require repentance, but a present marriage should ordinarily be honored rather than dissolved. Divorced believers are not beyond forgiveness, fellowship or service. Leadership qualification requires a distinct examination of character and circumstances.

Genesis 2 18 through 24 Gods Design for Marriage

Genesis introduces marriage before sin enters the world. God says that man's aloneness is not good, creates the woman and brings her to the man. Adam receives her as “bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh.” The narrator then explains that a man leaves father and mother, cleaves to his wife and the two become one flesh.

The word translated “cleave” communicates durable attachment. One flesh includes bodily union but is not exhausted by it. Husband and wife form a joined life. Jesus later treats this union as God's action: “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

Malachi 2:14 adds covenant language by calling the wife “thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant.” Marriage is neither merely a private emotion nor merely a civil contract. It is a public covenant witnessed by God and expressed through faithful companionship.

The creation account establishes the controlling direction of the study. Exceptions must never become the center of Christian marriage. The ordinary calling is lifelong fidelity, mutual care and a union that resists the culture's tendency to treat people as replaceable.

Deuteronomy 24 1 through 4 Divorce Regulated

Deuteronomy 24 is frequently described as a command to give a certificate of divorce. The command in the case, however, comes after the woman has been divorced and has entered another marriage. The first husband is forbidden from taking her again after the second marriage ends.

The certificate recognizes that the woman has been released from the first household. It gives public form to the divorce and limits the first husband's power to reclaim her after another marriage. The passage does not present divorce as the ideal. It regulates a broken situation and prevents further degradation.

The phrase translated “some uncleanness” became the subject of competing interpretations. By the time of Jesus, the question was whether the phrase allowed divorce only for serious indecency or for almost any cause. Matthew 19 should be read against that debate.

Deuteronomy 24 also matters for present remarriages. After an intervening marriage, return to the first spouse is prohibited. A person cannot repair one broken covenant by breaking another existing marriage.

Malachi 2 10 through 16 Covenant Treachery

Malachi addresses men who have dealt treacherously with the wives of their youth. God rejects their worship because their conduct at home contradicts the covenant they claim to honor.

The familiar KJV statement is that the LORD hates putting away. The Hebrew wording of verse 16 is difficult, and some translations make the divorcing husband the subject who hates and puts away. The translation question should be acknowledged, but the passage's moral direction is clear. God condemns treacherous repudiation and the violence connected with it.

The phrase must not be aimed indiscriminately at every divorced person. The abandoned spouse has not become the object of God's hatred. Malachi assures the betrayed person that God witnessed the covenant and saw the treachery.

The passage also corrects religious hypocrisy. A person cannot mistreat a spouse and assume that public worship conceals the contradiction. God joins conduct within the home to integrity before the altar.

Matthew 19 3 The Question for Every Cause

The Pharisees ask whether a man may put away his wife “for every cause.” Their wording reveals the issue. They test whether Jesus will endorse a broad male privilege to divorce.

Jesus does not begin by defining the minimum paperwork. He asks whether they have read the creation account. He joins Genesis 1 and Genesis 2, affirming male and female, leaving and cleaving, one flesh and God's act of joining.

Jesus' answer protects marriage and confronts the misuse of religious law. A certificate could confirm a civil divorce, but it could not make selfish abandonment righteous. Modern no-fault terminology presents a similar limitation. It may describe the legal procedure without identifying who broke the covenant.

The passage warns people who search Scripture only for an exit. The Christian question is not how little cause will justify departure. It is what faithfulness to God's joining requires.

Matthew 19 7 through 8 Hardness of Heart

The Pharisees describe Moses as commanding divorce. Jesus says Moses permitted it because of hardness of heart. “From the beginning it was not so.”

Hardness can belong to one spouse or both. It may express itself through adultery, selfish desertion, cruelty, violence or refusal to repent. Therefore, saying that divorce exists because of hardness does not prove equal guilt. A faithful spouse may suffer the consequences of another person's hardened decision.

The distinction prevents two opposite errors. Divorce must not be normalized as morally neutral. The divorced person must not be condemned merely because the marriage ended. Scripture asks what the heart chose and what conduct followed.

Matthew 19 9 The Exception for Fornication

The KJV records Jesus saying, “except it be for fornication.” The underlying word *porneia* ordinarily refers broadly to sexual immorality. Within marriage, adultery is the clearest application.

Some interpreters limit the exception to sexual sin during Jewish betrothal. Others understand it as an unlawful union. The immediate discussion in Matthew 19 concerns husbands, wives, one flesh and remarriage. That setting strongly supports application to sexual immorality within marriage.

The exception is permission, not a command. Sexual betrayal does not automatically dissolve the marriage. Reconciliation may be possible when repentance is genuine. Yet the betrayed spouse cannot create reconciliation alone or be required to trust an offender who remains deceptive.

Questions about pornography and online conduct require care. Jesus identifies lust as adultery of the heart, but not every inward sin produces the same covenant consequence as physical adultery. Repeated interactive sexual conduct, paid sexual behavior and entrenched refusal to abandon pornography may represent serious sexual betrayal. Facts, patterns and repentance matter.

Mark 10 and Luke 16 The General Rule

Mark and Luke record Jesus' prohibition without Matthew's exception. A permanence interpretation treats these statements as absolute and interprets Matthew narrowly. The exception interpretation treats Mark and Luke as the general rule and Matthew as an inspired qualification.

Mark 10:11 says a man who wrongfully divorces and remarries commits adultery “against her.” The discarded wife is recognized as the person sinned against. Verse 12 applies the corresponding standard to a woman who leaves her husband.

This symmetry is pastorally important. Men can be abandoned, betrayed and abused. Women can also be covenant-breakers. The church should not decide responsibility through assumptions about sex or social status.

First Corinthians 7 1 through 9 Mutual Obligations

Paul begins with mutual marital duties. Husband and wife owe appropriate affection to each other. Each is said to possess authority concerning the other's body. The reciprocity rules out using the passage as permission for sexual force.

Abstinence should occur by consent, for a limited spiritual purpose and with reunion in view. Persistent sexual manipulation is contrary to the passage. Illness, pain, trauma, medication and relational injury must nevertheless be considered before labeling reduced intimacy as willful deprivation.

The larger point is that Biblical marriage includes mutual obligations. A covenant cannot be defined only by legal residence while companionship, provision and fidelity are deliberately rejected.

First Corinthians 7 10 through 11 The Spouse Who Departs

Paul commands a wife not to depart and a husband not to put away his wife. If the wife departs, she is told to remain unmarried or be reconciled.

These words confront the person who chooses an unauthorized departure. They do not expressly assign the same restriction to a spouse who was left despite faithful opposition. This difference becomes important when Paul later addresses abandonment by an unbeliever.

Remaining unmarried preserves the possibility of reconciliation and prevents a departing spouse from using divorce as a route to another relationship. The passage should not be used to force the abandoned spouse to carry the deserter's moral responsibility without considering verse 15.

First Corinthians 7 12 through 14 A Willing Unbelieving Spouse

Paul forbids a believer from leaving an unbelieving spouse who is willing to remain. Conversion does not invalidate the existing marriage or permit a believer to seek a more spiritual partner.

The unbelieving spouse and the children are described as sanctified or holy in relation to the believer. This does not promise automatic salvation. It affirms that the household is not spiritually contaminated by the mixed-faith marriage and that the believer's presence has holy significance.

This teaching corrects religious abandonment. A person may not destroy a willing marriage and claim that spiritual incompatibility required it.

First Corinthians 7 15 The Abandoned Believer

Paul then addresses the circumstance the believer cannot control: “But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart.” In Roman Corinth, decisive departure could function as divorce. Paul does not command the believer to prevent the departure at any cost.

“A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases.” The protection belongs equally to men and women. At minimum, the believer is not guilty for allowing the unbeliever to leave and is not enslaved to pursuing an unwilling spouse.

The principal disagreement concerns remarriage. Some understand freedom only from the duty to resist separation. Others understand release from the marriage itself. The latter reading better fits the practical meaning of abandonment and Paul's assurance of peace. It also avoids making the unbeliever's unilateral act govern the faithful believer's entire future.

The conclusion should be applied through an orderly process. A temporary departure after an argument is not necessarily irremediable desertion. Evidence of finality may include civil divorce, sustained refusal of reconciliation, rejection of church appeals and the formation of another household or relationship.

When the Deserter Professes Christianity

First Corinthians 7:15 names an unbeliever. A professing Christian who leaves should be called to repentance and reconciliation through Matthew 18. The church should hear evidence, seek restoration and use discipline when the person remains unrepentant.

A verbal profession cannot excuse continuing rebellion. When a person refuses to hear the church, Jesus directs the church to regard that person as an outsider. This does not make every marital disagreement a ground for discipline. It does prevent a deserter from using Christian identity to hold the abandoned spouse indefinitely.

Historic Protestant teaching has described willful desertion that cannot be remedied by church or civil authority as sufficient to dissolve marriage. The qualifications are valuable. Desertion must be willful, serious, persistent and beyond available remedy.

The Spouse Divorced Against His or Her Will

This circumstance deserves direct treatment because it occurs frequently. A faithful spouse may receive divorce papers without warning. He or she may oppose the divorce, request counseling and remain willing to honor the covenant, yet be unable to stop the legal process.

Such a person is not guilty merely because the divorce became final. Responding to court papers, protecting custody rights or signing a settlement does not necessarily express moral consent. The person who completes legal paperwork is not always the person who caused the marriage to end.

The abandoned person should examine personal faults honestly without accepting false equivalence. No spouse is perfect. Imperfect communication does not make another person's adultery or desertion inevitable. Each person answers for his or her own covenant-breaking conduct.

Where abandonment is decisive and reconciliation has become impossible, the better reading of 1 Corinthians 7 allows the innocent spouse to remarry in the Lord. The person should not be rushed, but neither should the church impose arbitrary lifelong singleness as the penalty for another person's rebellion.

Separation and Immediate Safety

Separation may be necessary before divorce or remarriage can be evaluated. Physical violence, sexual assault, threats, child endangerment and severe coercive control justify immediate protective action.

Calling police, reporting crime, obtaining a protective order or entering safe housing is not an attack upon marriage. The offending conduct attacked the home. Forgiveness does not require silence, withdrawal of lawful protection or immediate reunion.

Church leaders should not conduct joint counseling when that setting gives an abuser more information or opportunity to retaliate. They should use qualified domestic-violence and legal assistance when necessary. The church's desire for reconciliation must never outrun the requirements of truth and safety.

Abuse as Possible Abandonment

The Bible expressly names sexual immorality and departure by an unbeliever. It does not contain a single sentence naming every form of abuse as a divorce ground. This calls for careful reasoning rather than indifference.

One view permits safety separation but not divorce or remarriage unless sexual immorality or literal desertion occurs. Another views severe, unrepentant abuse as constructive abandonment because the offender has repudiated the covenant's obligations while remaining physically present.

Exodus 21:10-11 is relevant because it recognizes food, clothing and marital rights as obligations owed even to a vulnerable wife. Whether that law supplies continuing grounds for Christian divorce is debated. At minimum, it refutes a view of marriage in which mere physical residence fulfills the covenant while provision and care are deliberately withheld.

The church should identify immediate safety needs first. It can then examine whether the conduct is persistent, severe, unrepentant and functionally destructive of marital life. Ordinary conflict, immaturity and seasons of strain must not be relabeled abuse merely to create an exception.

Forgiveness Reconciliation and Trust

Forgiveness relinquishes personal vengeance and entrusts justice to God. Reconciliation restores a relationship. Trust expresses justified confidence in another person's character.

One person can forgive. Reconciliation requires participation by both people. Trust requires evidence. Therefore, an injured spouse may forgive while remaining separated, cooperating with criminal justice or waiting for sustained proof of change.

An apology is not sufficient by itself. Repentance ends the conduct, tells the truth without blame-shifting, accepts consequences, welcomes accountability and makes restitution where possible. Demanding immediate trust can become another form of manipulation.

Remarriage After a Valid Divorce

The permanence view, the divorce-without-remarriage view and the exception view each attempt to honor Scripture. The first two emphasize Mark 10, Luke 16, Romans 7 and 1 Corinthians 7:39. The exception view gives broader force to Matthew's exception and Paul's statement that the abandoned believer is not under bondage.

This commentary recommends the exception view. A divorce validly grounded in sexual immorality or irremediable abandonment may free the innocent spouse to remarry. Remarriage should be “only in the Lord” and should follow honest examination, healing and attention to children and continuing responsibilities.

Freedom is not urgency. A new relationship should not be used to avoid grief or to establish retroactive proof that the former spouse was solely wrong. Mature counsel can help identify unresolved patterns before another covenant is made.

Existing Remarriages

A person may recognize that an earlier divorce and remarriage lacked Biblical grounds. The correct response begins with confession rather than self-justification. It may include apology, financial responsibility and renewed care for children.

The present marriage should ordinarily remain intact. Deuteronomy 24 forbids return to the first spouse after an intervening marriage. Scripture does not command a second divorce as repentance for the first. The present husband or wife and any children possess real claims that must be honored.

Repentance therefore means faithfulness now. The couple should stop repeating old patterns, speak truthfully about the past and build a home marked by covenant loyalty.

Divorce Before Conversion

First Corinthians 6:11 declares that people with serious sexual histories may be washed, sanctified and justified through Jesus Christ. Conversion does not erase historical consequences, but it changes the believer's standing before God.

A new believer should not leave a willing present spouse. A current remarriage should be honored. Continuing duties to children and former dependents remain. Grace forgives sin and produces responsible obedience.

The church should reject the idea that divorce is uniquely beyond Christ's cleansing. A believer's identity rests in Christ, not in the marital-status field on a civil record.

Children and Continuing Duties

Children must never be made responsible for the divorce or used as instruments in adult conflict. Parents should not require loyalty tests, use children as messengers or disclose adult details that children cannot carry.

Financial obligations remain moral obligations. Child support, medical care, education and lawful debts should be honored. A new household does not erase duties to the first household's children.

Where contact is safe, children should be allowed meaningful relationships with both parents. Where credible danger exists, protection comes first. The church should support single parents and children practically, not merely render a judgment about grounds.

Church Service and Leadership

Divorced and remarried believers should not automatically be excluded from membership, fellowship or ordinary service. Sin should be addressed according to repentance and present character, while suffering imposed by another person should not be treated as disqualification.

Pastoral and deacon qualifications require additional examination. “The husband of one wife” concerns marital fidelity and exemplary character. A divorce may reveal serious disqualification, or it may reveal that the candidate was faithful while being abandoned.

The church should consider causation, timing, conversion, repentance, present marriage, care of children and public reputation. Forgiveness does not automatically create fitness for every office, and a legal divorce does not automatically destroy fitness.

Pastoral Safeguards

Do not tell a person in immediate danger to return home before safety is established.

Do not promise confidentiality that would conceal child abuse, credible threats or other reportable conduct.

Do not assume the person who filed caused the divorce.

Do not assign equal guilt merely because both spouses are imperfect.

Do not accept every accusation without fair examination.

Do not mistake tears over consequences for repentance.

Do not require immediate trust after betrayal.

Do not use Hosea as a universal command to remain with an unrepentant adulterer or abuser.

Do not require a current married couple to divorce in order to repair an earlier wrongful divorce.

Do not describe every divorced believer as disqualified, damaged or spiritually inferior.

Gospel Hope

Marriage points to Christ and the church, but no human marriage can save. A long marriage does not justify the sinner. A divorce does not place the repentant believer beyond grace.

Jesus is the faithful Bridegroom. He tells the truth about sin, protects the weak, receives the repentant and never abandons His redeemed. His death and resurrection provide forgiveness for adulterers, deserters, the self-righteous and every other sinner who turns to Him.

The Gospel does not call evil good. It makes guilty people clean and wounded people whole. It enables a struggling marriage to pursue restoration, an abandoned spouse to release false guilt and a remarried couple to become faithful in the covenant they now have.

Reflection Questions

Do I begin with God's design for marriage or with the exception I want to find?

Have I confused the legal filing of divorce with moral responsibility for causing it?

Am I asking an injured person to forgive, reconcile and trust as though those actions were identical?

If I harmed a spouse or family, what would truthful repentance and continuing responsibility require?

How can the church protect marriage while also protecting people endangered within a home?

Have I treated divorced believers according to evidence and present character, or according to a label?

What does Christ's faithfulness teach me about my own promises?

Closing Prayer

Our Heavenly Father, teach us to honor the marriage covenant and to judge painful circumstances truthfully. Strengthen husbands and wives who are seeking restoration. Expose adultery, violence and abandonment, and bring offenders to genuine repentance. Protect spouses and children who are in danger. Comfort those who were divorced against their will and free them from guilt that does not belong to them. Give wisdom to church leaders and grace to divorced and remarried believers who desire to obey You. Thank You for the faithful love of Jesus Christ and for the cleansing available through His blood. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

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