

Focus Text

“Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. And large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, ‘Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?’ He answered, ‘Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast 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 not man separate.’ They said to him, ‘Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?’ He said to them, ‘Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.’” (Matthew 19:1–9, ESV)

Divorce

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” (Genesis 2:24–25, ESV)

As Jesus journeys toward Jerusalem, He continues His teaching ministry with renewed urgency. Large crowds follow Him from various regions, eager to learn more from His teachings, which serves as a testament to His growing reputation as a prophet and healer. He heals the sick, casts out demons, feeds thousands, and even calms the forces of nature, demonstrating His divine authority. Along the way, some Pharisees approach Him with a question about divorce, seeking to test Him and trap Him in a theological corner. Jesus had already addressed this in the Sermon on the Mount, but the current context made it even more volatile. Additionally, the recent execution of His cousin, John the Baptist—who was killed by Herod for criticizing Herod's unlawful marriage to his brother's wife—made this a highly relevant and dangerous topic. It was also a subject of intense public debate among the rabbis of that time, with various schools of thought offering conflicting interpretations.

When asked for His opinion, Jesus bypasses the rabbinic debates and points directly back to the creation account in Genesis. He highlights that in the beginning, husband and wife were created as two halves of a whole, complementary in every way and never meant to be separated. Before sin entered the world, God’s design was for one man and one woman to be united in marriage, raising a family together in harmony. Marriage is a

10.4.2026 Discover the King “Divorce” Matthew 19:1-9

beautiful symbol of Christ and the church, a profound theological theme the Apostle Paul later explores in Ephesians 5. Jesus emphasizes that divorce is a result of human brokenness and sin, not part of God's original design for humanity. A husband and wife are meant to build a lifelong union, which is why our modern wedding vows promise faithfulness "for better or for worse, till death do us part." This underscores that the intent of the marriage relationship is founded not on human ritual or convenience, but by God from the very beginning of time.

The Pharisees challenged Jesus by bringing up Deuteronomy chapter 24, which says that a man may offer a certificate of divorce to his wife under certain conditions. There were two main schools of thought during the time of Jesus regarding this passage. One group, following the strict Rabbi Shammai, believed that the only valid grounds for divorce mentioned in Deuteronomy 24 was sexual unfaithfulness or infidelity. They argued that this would be acceptable to offer a divorce certificate because when one has offered their body sexually to another, they have broken the sacred union that was designed for one man and one woman. In essence, the certificate of divorce is making public what has already happened in private. The rival school, following Rabbi Hillel, on the other hand, focused on the phrase "anything indecent" and decided what that meant was for whatever reason if a man is not pleased with his wife, he may offer her a certificate of divorce. There are some rabbinic texts that shockingly say men could divorce their wives over something as trivial as burnt food. However, it was also known in the wealthier circles of the Pharisees and the Sadducees that men would basically create sex rings where they would offer certificates of divorce so that they could essentially wife swap and enjoy sexual orgies while trying to maintain the facade that they were remaining pure to the law of Moses. Women in the ancient world were at a severe disadvantage politically and societally and needed the support of a good man to survive in almost all cases. We see here the sinful behavior of people claiming to love God, putting women in very broken situations and violating the law that God had put in place, and also the heart God had established in creation that a man and woman would remain faithful to one another, thus creating a beautiful picture of oneness in humanity. This sexual swapping also violates the understanding of Christ and the church as Paul states in Ephesians 5.

Jesus is acutely aware of all of the deviant sexual activity and broken moral behavior of God's people in this area. And when the Pharisees push back and demand an answer for why Moses allowed divorce in the first place, if God's intent was for divorce to not happen, Jesus reveals that it is not a desire from the Lord. It is a concession for moral brokenness. As the scriptures declare, there are a few reasons divorce could happen, mainly infidelity, or an

unbelieving spouse leaving. In those particular instances, it is still a grievous moment where two that have been joined as one are ripped apart. Personally, I am very well aware that there is no easy nor good divorce. All divorces hurt the heart of God and hurt the heart of those involved, whether they have justifiable grounds or not. Jesus is revealing that divorce is an action that was brought about by sin, not a desire of the heart of the Father. Jesus then begins to deal with the sex rings, where religious men are trying to say that they have not broken any of the laws of Moses when in reality they have continually violated them. If you remember back to the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, if you look at someone of the opposite sex with lust in your heart, you have already committed adultery. Jesus is calling these men to repentance, revealing to them they are not innocent according to the law, but as a matter of fact in their sexual deviancy, they are grievous adulterers who have violated women over and over again, and they cannot claim to be sinless in front of God. Instead, they are guilty of adultery. This is cause for them to repent, because they have broken what God desired to make whole.

There is only one caveat that is made, which is if the spouse has already committed sexual immorality, then the charge of adultery against the one seeking divorce is no longer on the table. God does not desire nor endorse divorce, but a person who leaves a marriage after infidelity is not guilty of that adultery.

Marriage is not easy. It is far more than just sexual attraction; marriage is an active act of work where two individuals make the proclamation that they will stand next to each other in moments of great success and moments of great failure. They promise to love one another when they are well and when they are sick, and when there are moments of plenty and moments of scarcity. The timeline of marriage is the entirety of one's physical life because when you take a spouse, you are joining together and becoming one flesh. In essence, the spiritual reality of marriage is two halves are becoming one whole. This is the beauty and the responsibility of forming a home and knowing someone both intimately and sexually.

In modern Western culture, divorce is prevalent, and throughout the church, the divorce rates are not much different than outside of the church. First, divorce is not named as the unforgivable sin. God can forgive someone who has committed adultery, but first one must admit that their actions have been adulterous to receive God's forgiveness. But secondly, it gives pause to the understanding of what it means to take a husband or wife in marriage. It is not merely to enjoy a lavish celebration and for a man to be put in a tuxedo and a woman to be put in a long white dress, but instead it is building a home together. The home that is established is supposed to be a reflection of Christ

and the church, and the way that a husband loves his wife and a wife respects her husband displays to the world the love that Christ has for us as his bride. It is a very serious thing that individuals need to prayerfully discern at the deepest level because once a covenant has happened, breaking it is no mere inconvenience. It is ripping apart something that God has joined together, and there is no such thing as an easy divorce. All divorce is ugly and all participants, whether they have been offended or not, will leave more broken than they started.

When marriage is lived out the way that God designed it for a husband and wife to complement one another, it will not necessarily be easier, but when a man and a woman keep God in the center of this covenant and are reminded of its designed and desired purpose, a healthy biblical marriage is one of the greatest gifts that any couple can experience because in a marriage you are fully known. In Genesis, there is a phrase, "they are naked and unashamed." This has two connotations: one, nakedness refers to sexuality. They are able to enjoy sex freely. Christians are not an anti-sex people; we are a pro-marriage people. If you want to have sex, you should engage in marriage. Even the Apostle Paul says that if a man is burning with desire, then they should go and get married. But secondly, that phrase "naked and not ashamed" is the understanding that when we are naked we are fully exposed. A loving marriage is a place where both husband and wife are able to be themselves, and that means being able to show off the sides of them that they are proud of and the sides that they are ashamed of. It is a place where healing can happen. A healthy marriage is a place where the couple knows how to finish each other's sentences and are well aware of the strengths and shortcomings of their spouse, and yet they share an unconditional love with them. Marriage is one of the closest loving relationships that displays the grace of Christ in the world.

Application

If you're dating and considering engagement, ask yourself whether you are ready to enter into a lifelong covenant. Marriage means becoming two halves of a whole, a union that God intends to last a lifetime. If you are dating with the goal of marriage, I encourage you to go on a date this week to have some of those deeper conversations. Discuss your dreams, your core values, and whether you hope to have children. It is also important to be vulnerable about the potential challenges you might face together.

If you are married, set aside time for a date this week. This is your opportunity to be completely open and unashamed with one another. Share a meal and have a genuine conversation about where you are spiritually, physically, mentally, and emotionally. Talk about how you can help each other grow closer to Jesus. Be sure to affirm one another, sharing exactly what you love and appreciate about your spouse. It is also a time to gently work through any ongoing challenges. Communication is the backbone of a strong marriage, and true intimacy requires letting your spouse know how you are really doing so you can support one another. Finally, make time to enjoy physical intimacy in private, which remains a vital and beautiful part of your marital connection.

Finally, for those who are single, I encourage you to keep loving the people around you. We will be talking about the unique beauty of singleness next Sunday, and I hope you will join us. We want you to know that you are a vital part of this church family. Amen.

“In Matthew, as in Mark and Luke, this is the first instance we learn of Jesus traveling to Jerusalem during his adult ministry. John has portrayed him going there regularly in conjunction with the major Jewish feasts (John 2:13–25; 5:1–47; 7:1–10:39), as faithful adult Jewish males were supposed to do. The Synoptics' silence does not contradict John.”¹

¹ Blomberg, Craig. 1992. Matthew. Vol. 22. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

10.4.2026 Discover the King “Divorce” Matthew 19:1-9

“Their question reflects the intra-Pharisaic debate between the “schools” of Shammai and Hillel concerning the correct interpretation of Deut 24:1. In that passage God apparently permitted divorce for “anything indecent.” Shammai, placing the emphasis on “indecent,” took this to refer to sexual unfaithfulness; Hillel, placing the emphasis on “anything,” allowed divorce even for as trivial an offense as a wife burning her husband’s food (m. Git. 9:10). The recent Herodias affair (14:3–12), along with Jesus’ own teaching in 5:31–32, may also have influenced the Pharisees’ question (for further background see under 5:31–32). The wording reflects only a man’s perspective, since women were rarely if ever able to divorce in ancient Judaism. Yet although no reciprocal language appears in this context, 5:31 and Mark 10:11–12 show that Jesus’ teachings on the topic granted both women and men equal privileges and responsibilities.”²

“When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then 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 of his house, and she departs out of his house, and if she goes and becomes another man’s wife, and the latter man hates 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 man dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the Lord. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance.”
(Deuteronomy 24:1–4, ESV)

“That is to say, the toleration of divorce by the law is a departure from the high standard of morality presupposed in the creation of a single pair. Divorce is a bad custom which has grown up amongst a degenerate people, and the Mosaic law tolerated it as an accommodation to a low level of moral custom. Mk. has: “And Jesus said, For the hardness of your heart he wrote for you this commandment.”³

² m. Git. Mishna Gittin

Blomberg, Craig. 1992. Matthew. Vol. 22. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

³ Allen, Willoughby C. 1907. A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Matthew. International Critical Commentary. New York: C. Scribner’s Sons.

10.4.2026 Discover the King “Divorce” Matthew 19:1-9

“The passage you’ve attached refers to how the Herodias affair and Jesus’ earlier teaching on divorce may have shaped the Pharisees’ question ([Matt 19:3](#)). To understand this fully, you need the broader context.

John the Baptist had been arrested and executed after speaking against Herodias, who divorced Antipas’s half-brother to marry Antipas himself, violating Levitical law^[1]. This wasn’t merely a personal scandal—it was a public challenge to the legitimacy of Herod Antipas’s rule. The Pharisees raised the divorce question while Jesus was in Antipas’s territory, potentially hoping his answer would incriminate him as John had been incriminated^[2].

The reference to Jesus’ teaching in [Matthew 5:31–32](#) is equally significant. Jesus’ teachings on divorce granted both women and men equal privileges and responsibilities ([Matt 19:3](#))—a radical position that departed from contemporary rabbinic debate. The Pharisees’ question reflected the dispute between Shammai’s school, which restricted divorce to sexual unfaithfulness, and Hillel’s school, which permitted it for trivial reasons ([Matt 19:3](#)).

By combining these influences—the dangerous precedent of John’s fate, Jesus’ own previous statements, and the rabbinic controversy—Blomberg explains why the Pharisees posed their question strategically. They aimed either to force Jesus into conflict with the Mosaic Law or to lure him into making a politically dangerous remark about Herod Antipas’s marriage, which would endanger his life as it had John’s^[3]. The question wasn’t innocent; it was a calculated trap designed to exploit the tension between Jesus’ known teachings and the volatile political situation.”⁴

⁴ [1] Craig Blomberg, [Matthew](#), The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), [22:229](#).

[2] Peter G. Bolt, [Matthew: A Great Light Dawns](#), ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2014), [183](#).

[3] J. Carl Laney, “[Chapter 1: No Divorce & No Remarriage](#),” in *Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views*, ed. H. Wayne House, Spectrum Multiview Books (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, n.d.), [31–32](#).