

**Text: Mt 19.3-9**

The question we are answering today isn't simply the one in my title:

*What About Divorce?*

Rather, the question is more specific.

“If a marriage has a husband who is drunk every night and found passed out on the kitchen floor in front of the children every morning, would that alone constitute a divorce?”

The question assumes the negativity of divorce. The Christian doctrine of marriage emphasizes the permanence of marriage. That is well known, as is the generally negative attitude towards divorce.

- Yet we know of many problems in marriages, some of them very serious.
- We also know that many people, facing these problems, resort to divorce.
- And we know that Christians speak out against divorce, almost always.

We generally have a sense that God allows divorce in some cases, though it isn't his desire. God's will is for married people to live together in harmony for the glory of God.

But we also know that God allowed divorce in certain circumstances. We look at what God says and then we look at our lives and compare them to the Scriptures.

Additionally, Christians who have either divorce in their past or in their families wonder how the Scriptures speak to those circumstances. Have I done right or wrong? What should I think about it?

Before we get into the teaching about marriage and divorce, I want to address the past and our regrets for what we've done in the past.

First, when someone becomes a Christian, everything is forgiven. Everything.

Even if past actions *were* sins, they are forgiven.

Second, even if someone sins as a Christian, every sin is under the blood, already forgiven. And you can confess sins that you committed as a Christian.

If you come to God in humility, recognize what you have done, ask for his forgiveness, your sins are forgiven.

Now let's get at the question.

## I. The permanence of marriage (3-6)

### A. Marriage repeats (in image) original creation

1. Jesus quotes first Gen 1.27: the creation of man, male and female (4)
2. Jesus then quotes Gen 2.24: the original marriage covenant, prefacing it with "for this reason"
  - a. Creation is the reason for marriage
  - b. When a couple marry, they become in God's eyes "one flesh" (5)
  - c. The original creation
    - 1) One man
    - 2) One woman (from a rib in the one man's side)
    - 3) Literally "flesh of my flesh"
  - d. The re-imaged creation: marriage
    - 1) Two become one flesh
    - 2) They aren't "one flesh" actually
    - 3) They are "one flesh" by covenantal decree

The minister pronounces them, "man and wife," as a witness to what God has done

### B. God's ideal allows for dissolution of marriage no more than for the dissolution of an intact person (6)

1. God joined them together
2. Let no man separate
  - a. "put asunder" KJV

b. Break apart, put distance between

*“The Separaters, a name given to those Grammarians who ascribed the Iliad and Odyssey to different authors”<sup>1</sup>*

The image would be if one took a single person and “separated” him into atoms — you don’t have a whole person left.

## II. God’s view of divorce (7-8)

### A. Pharisees cite Moses (7, see Dt 24.1)

Their reasoning: Moses allowed divorce, God must allow divorce.

### B. Jesus counters with God’s view (8)

1. Moses allowance recognizes human hardness of hearts
2. God’s plan has not been for divorce from the beginning
3. God explicitly confirms this in Mal 2.16

Mal 2.16 *“For I hate divorce,” says the LORD, the God of Israel, “and him who covers his garment with wrong,” says the LORD of hosts. “So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.”*

## III. God’s protecting allowances (9)

### A. What are we to make of the exception clause in v. 9

1. Does this change God’s view of marriage, or of divorce? No
2. God points out that divorce and remarriage creates more confusion

### B. What does the exception, “except for immorality” mean?

1. The word is the general word for immorality, *i.e.*, usually translated “fornication”
2. When someone breaks the marriage covenant by immorality, the person who is sinned against is free from the covenant

<sup>1</sup> Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon, Revised and Augmented Throughout*, ed. Sir Henry Stuart Jones and Roderick McKenzie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940).

## C. What about 1 Corinthians 7?

1 Cor 7.12-16 But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. <sup>13</sup> And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away. <sup>14</sup> For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. <sup>15</sup> Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace. <sup>16</sup> For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?

1. Here we see an incompatibility: a believing spouse has an unbelieving spouse
2. This “incompatibility” isn’t grounds for abandoning the covenant
3. However, if the unbeliever abandons the covenant, the believer “is not under bondage” — the covenant no longer binds them

## IV. Making sense in light of our question

“If a marriage has a husband who is drunk every night and found passed out on the kitchen floor in front of the children every morning, would that alone constitute a divorce?”

### A. What this scenario does not describe:

1. Immorality
2. Abandonment

### B. Nevertheless, the scenario describes a problem

1. Usually, such a scenario is accompanied by other problems
  - a. Physical spousal abuse
  - b. Or even child abuse

No Christian should counsel someone to remain in an abusive environment! [but this is not the same things as counseling divorce]

2. Nevertheless, suppose the problem doesn't include abuse
  - a. The Bible gives no grounds for divorce here
  - b. The Bible would call for counsel, prayer, witness, intervention, etc.
  - c. Sometimes the situation may endanger the savings, home, resources of the family
    - 1) There may be grounds for protecting resources
    - 2) But not grounds for divorce

### Conclusion:

The question doesn't admit of easy solutions. It's all too easy to glibly say, "sure, go ahead, get rid of him (or her)"

Yet this doesn't seem to be the way of faith.

- I will always counsel for safety

But I wouldn't counsel divorce: God makes marriage sacred, and the Christian in a marriage must do everything to keep it sacred, even with an unbelieving or misbehaving spouse.