

Series	Sermon on the Mount
Study	Study 6
Topic	Divorce and Remarriage
Reference	Matthew 19:1-9
Date	6 May 2019
Speaker	Dr Peter Ng

Welcome back to Gamma 15. Today, we're going to continue in our study on the Sermon on the Mount and the topic is Divorce and Marriage. A very controversial topic, which the church has been grappling with over hundreds of years, because there are many different stances on whether one can get divorce, and what circumstances and whether one could get remarriage. And so therefore the passage is now taken from Matthew chapter five verses 31 and 32 and also Matthew chapter 19 verses 1 to 9. So these two are related. I will be looking at that as we go on.

Divorce is common in society today that a child born has only a 50% chance of living with both parents by the age of 16, which is a really sad testimony of the kind of society in which we live. Here is some data from our own country, Malaysia, 2004 to 2012. And you can see, although the number of marriages are rising, more or less, 200,000 every year, the divorce rate is also rising in tandem. This is a established trend that's already been there.

What about the divorce rate among Christians? Will religion or faith make a difference? Here's some data from the Barna group in 2004, and it showed a uniform rate of divorce, whether among born again Christians or all Christians, whether a Catholic or even non-Christian faith or atheists about the same when you just asked them about their religion and the percentages of those who are divorced. However, if you look really go into it in a little bit more depth, you'll find that among Protestants who actually regularly attend church, they are less likely to have divorce compared to those who have no affiliation to all. Normally attending conservative Protestants are 20% more likely to divorce compared to their secular counterparts. So faith does make a difference.

Let's look at the Bible passage, which had been assigned to us today in Matthew. We will start off with Matthew 5:31.

It was also said, Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' 32 But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

So this is the main passage. Let's look at another passage further along the book of Matthew because it gives us more information, so that we'll be able to help identify and understand what Jesus is trying to tell us from his stand on divorce. This is Matthew 19, verses 1 to 9

Matthew 19: 1 Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. 2 And large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. 3 And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" 4 He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, 5 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"? 6 So they are no longer two but one flesh. What

therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” 7 They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?” 8 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. 9 And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”

So the topic is divorce and the Matthew 19 passage tells us the context in which Jesus was answering these questions. It was the Pharisees to have brought this up and they asked, they want to trap him. They were going to trick him as it were. Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause and basically what they were alluding to was a passage in Deuteronomy 24, which I believe Jesus has shown them that they had misunderstood and they use that passage as an excuse to divorce a wife. So let's look at the passage.

The Matthew passages for which Jesus being asked is actually taken from Deuteronomy 24. That's what the Pharisees were asking him about in terms of divorce. So in order to understand that a little bit better we have to turn to Deuteronomy 10:24, which is the passage on which this discussion is based. Unless we look at it and we won't have any understanding.

Deuteronomy 24:1 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, 2 and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, 3 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, 4 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.

Now, if you look at the context of Deuteronomy 24, the actual passage is not about causes for which you want to divorce your wife. There is actually the prohibition of a man easily remarrying the wife whom he had just divorce. If you look at verse 4,

4 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

So therefore what he is saying is that, if the husband has divorced this wife and she is married somebody else, and he has divorced her, the first husband cannot remarry her because that is a sin. So that was what was referring to; however, what they have done is that they have taken the first part of Deuteronomy 24, which reads

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...

Now they're focusing on verse 1, which is the causes for which he may actually divorce the wife. So what they're focusing on is permission to divorce and on what grounds of divorce, which is actually not what the passage was about. So here are some examples of ancient divorce writ

On the twentieth day of Sivan, year three of the freedom of Israel ... I, Shelamzion, daughter of Joseph Qebshan from Ein Gedi, with you, you Eleazar son of Hananiah, who had been my husband before this time, that this is for you from me a bill of divorce and release....

So you actually have here a daughter of Joseph, which is a woman and here having a divorce from her husband, giving a writ of divorce from her to him actually. And here is another very-very early document, is a papyrus yadin.

“I will feed you and clothe you and I will bring you into my house.”

Which assumes that if you don't feed or clothe her then there will be a divorce. This is from the Mishnah Gittin 9:10. Now this gives the kind of ridiculous grounds in which the rabbis had started to use as grounds for divorce or excuses.

The House of Shammai (a group of Rabbis) say, “A man should divorce his wife only because he has found grounds for it in unchastity, which is basically infidelity. And the reason given is Dt. 24
“since it is said, Because he has found in her indecency in anything (Dt. 24:1).”

And then we have got the House of Hillel and this is worse,
“Even if she spoiled his dish, which is his dinner,
“since it is said, Because he has found in her indecency in anything. (Dt. 24:1)”

So therefore what they've done is that they have taken the word indecency and translated any way they like, whether it is sexual immorality or unchastity or indecency due to what spoiling his food. Then you've got Rabbi Aqiba and Aqiba says,

“Even if he found someone else prettier than she,
“since it is said, And it shall be if she find no favor in his eyes (Dt. 24:1).”

So therefore if she finds no favor in the eyes, because somebody else is prettier than her. So here we have got a kind of ridiculous grounds for divorce that the rabbis were now using and this is oppressing the women.

And here is another example from a very famous Jewish historian who actually converted and became Roman later on. A very famous historian, Titus Flavius Josephus. And he writes in his testimony.

At this period I divorced my wife, being displeased at her behaviour. She had borne me three children.... Afterwards I married a woman of Jewish extraction who had settled in Crete. She came of very distinguished parents.

You can see the grounds of divorce here is just because she displeased him. Well, there are some people today who will call this incompatibility or irreconcilable differences, not very much different.

So if you can look at Matthew 19 verses 4-6, Jesus answered them.

“Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female,

So therefore he refers back to Genesis chapter 2,

5 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’?

Verse 6 is very very important.

*6 So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore **God has joined together, let not man separate.***

So Jesus has said right out from the beginning. This passage has been misused. There's an overriding principle that actually predates this passage in Deuteronomy and that is Genesis and Genesis is very clear. It says that what God has joined together, God is the one who joined them together, they're one flesh. What God has joined together, you cannot separate, but they were not satisfied. In verse 7 you read.

*Matthew 19: 7 They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?" 8 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.*

So divorce in scripture is permitted only because of man's sin. Since divorce is only a concession because of man's evil character is sin, is not part of God's original plan and all should therefore hate divorce as God does and pursue it only when there's no other recourse. All right. So Jesus puts them in the right place. It's not that Deuteronomy gives you carte blanche to divorce. It was given because of the sinfulness of man.

Now let's look at the conditions in which you actually divorce. He says in verse 9,

9 And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."

So here we have in Matthew, the only part of the gospels that actually has an exception clause. If you divorce your wife under any circumstances and marry somebody else, you commit adultery, except if the spouse has committed sexual immorality. The word in Greek is 'porneia' and I just like to warn you that 'porneia' has different interpretations. That's why there are so many different kinds of approaches to or opinions about whether divorce or remarriage as possible. So porneia can be translated as premarital sex or incest in 1-Corinthians chapter 5, but most commonly it is translated as any sexual sin that destroys a marital covenant. For example, having sex with somebody outside who is not your spouse. Leviticus 20:10 to 21, porneia will include homosexuality, sex with animals, sex with relatives. So that is the only exception clause that you actually have.

Now If you have a spouse that actually has committed sexual immorality or adultery or sexual sin, do you actually have to divorce when the conditions are actually met? You see, interestingly enough, the Bible never commands divorce. You see, it permits, it regulates and limits divorce. It allows under circumstances because of the hardness of human hearts. Hard human hearts means when people persist with the sin and hard human hearts means you find it difficult to forgive. You can't forgive the spouse who has actually betrayed you. But in the New Testament, becoming a Christian is about getting a new heart, a soft heart filled with the power of the Holy spirit. Such a heart is possible to change in a direction of Jesus Christ. Such a heart makes it possible for us to forgive a brother or sister even in the most grievous of sins, because when Jesus died on the cross, he brought us forgiveness for our grievous sin. So therefore there's no real reason for two legitimately born again Christians to you ever get divorce, because by the grace of God they can change and they can forgive each other, but in a situation where they cannot because of their hardness of heart, neither party then divorce is actually permissible.

Well divorce, text on divorce is not easy, because there are apparent contradictions. If you look at the other two gospels, you will see in Mark chapter 10 verse 11, there is no exception clause,

Mark 10: 11B, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, 12 and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

Look at Luke

Luke 16::18 Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.

So here you actually have the two other gospels, they don't mention the exception clause. Matthew is the only one that has got exception clause in two parts. Now the possible reasons are maybe because Matthew retained the original reading of Deuteronomy 24 because his audience was mainly Jewish and the other two were gentile or Matthew was actually making explicit what was already assumed by Mark and Luke to be obvious to their readers.

The next issue: can a divorced person remarry?

This is actually quite controversial. There are two schools of thoughts.

1. You could divorce but not remarry.
2. You can divorce and remarriage because it is implied in the issue of divorce.

Well, the first one you can divorce, but not remarry is a modern interpretation of what Jesus is saying. However, Jesus never said you couldn't remarry. They assume because of the sanctity of marriage that once you are divorced you cannot remarry. However, to get some clarity, let's look at what Jesus said and what Paul said. Matthew chapter 5 verse 32.

*But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, **except on the ground of sexual immorality**, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.*

So here you actually have a situation that divorce alone cannot make you an adulterer, only marriage has occurred. He doesn't separate the two. Jesus doesn't separate the two. In 1-Corinthians chapter 7.

*1 Corinthians 7:15 But if the **unbelieving partner separates**, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not **enslaved**. God has called you to peace.*

Here, he is specifically saying that you are not bound. Now if you look at five verses further up, 1-Corinthians chapter 7 verse 10,

*To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband 11 (but if she does, **she should remain unmarried** or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.*

Now Paul is explicit. He's explicit about once divorce has occurred, you are not enslaved, you are free. If he wants to say divorce and not remarry, he actually specifies it, when he refers to divorce and remarriage he specifically say, you can divorce but you should not remarry. I say that very

specifically. And in a Jewish context, if you go and look into history, the divorce consisted of provision or certificate which actually gave you a right to remarry. Here's an example of a text from Mishnah Gittin 9:3

Let this be from me your writ of divorce, letter of dismissal, and deed of liberation, that you may marry anyone you want."

So the whole idea of divorce was that it allowed you to remarry. It was implicit in the certificate, well explicitly in the certificate.

Let's look at another issue. Under what circumstances can an unbiblically divorced person remarry. So this is a guy who has perhaps done the dirty on his wife, committed adultery and then basically they got divorced under that circumstances. It was an unbiblical divorce. It didn't have the exception clause. Can he remarry? Well, 1 Corinthians chapter 7 verse 10

*To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband 11 (but if she does, **she should remain unmarried** or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.*

So the ownness is to reconcile. The only time when you do not reconcile is the former spouse remarries, so the covenant is broken, the former spouse dies or the former spouse is an unbeliever.

What if an unbiblically divorced person has already remarried?

So if divorced, because of whatever reasons, if we are not right and you are already remarried, first of all you need to deal with the sin of adultery, from which you need to repent and come before the Lord.

Number two, continue in your current marriage and be faithful to your current wife.

Now can a person was divorced as a non-believer and now come to faith, can he remarry. Well the ownness is to reconcile, unless the former spouse dies or remarries and the covenant is broken or the former spouse is a unbeliever.

Now why is God so big on marriage and so negative on divorce. Let us look at a text in Malachi 2. He was the last prophet before the coming of Jesus.

*10 Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the **covenant** of our fathers? 11 Judah has been **faithless**, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD, which he loves, and has **married the daughter of a foreign god**. 12 May the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob any descendant of the man who does this, who brings an offering to the LORD of hosts!*

Here the prophet Malachi is chastising the people of Israel. They have been faithless to the covenant. The covenant is a promise that God will be the God of the people of Israel. They will be his people. And what they have done is that they have been faithless. They have worshiped other gods. They have married the daughter of a foreign god. Here's a metaphor of which their worship of a foreign god is like marriage.

So the second indictment, not only have they been faithless to God they have also been faithless to their wives. Verse 13 says,

*And this second thing you do. You cover the LORD'S altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. 14 But you say, "Why does he not?" Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been **faithless**, though she is your companion and your wife by **covenant***

So the second thing that they actually do is that they come to God and offer sacrifices and worship. God doesn't accept it because their lives are not in line. Why does God not accept the sacrifices? Because they have been faithless to their wives. They've actually abandoned the wife, they have committed adultery and they have actually betrayed their wives. So why does God take divorce so seriously. Well, let's read on.

*15 Did he not make them **one**, with a portion of the Spirit in their union?*

And here is a situation, God is the one who actually brought the two people, the two halves and made them one flesh. So marriage is a serious issue. He actually makes two human beings into one as it were with a portion of the spirit in their union, spirit was involved in their union. And what was the one God seeking. So here you actually have to one God, he's seeking to make that one flesh what, in order to get godly offspring. Offspring in a family that would actually reflect the love of God in their lives. So this is the picture that God wants the world to see of his chosen people. That is his showcase of the love of God. So we read on,

*So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. 16 "For the man who does not love his wife but **divorces** her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be **faithless**."*

So marriage is important. It's a reflection of what God has done in their lives. So, what is God saying? God is saying that marriage is not a trivial matter. It is a union, which God himself is involved in the marriage. He brings them together. There's a purpose, so that they have godly offspring, so that family and the love and the unity within the family reflects the love within God himself; father, son and Holy spirit. So this is a showcase to the world. So when you actually divorce, you are destroying that showcase to the world. You're destroying the witness to the world. You're destroying God's vision of what his people should be, and divorce is the beginning of the destruction of that vision.

So two more things I want to say about divorce and marriage. The first is covenants, which is actually mentioned in Malachi. Covenants are a hallmark of God's design. See our eternal life is linked to one thing that happened in history, thousands of years ago. God made a covenant with Abraham. And for thousands of years, right throughout Israel and down to our lives, God us kept that covenant. God has been faithful to the covenant. That's the only thing that keeps us alive eternally. And so therefore if God makes a covenant with us and he keeps it He expects us to reflect him and make covenant with one another, with our wives and keep that. So that covenant is a hallmark of God's design and God's people.

The other one is a hallmark of who God is. God is father, son and Holy spirit, three and yet one. And there's a Greek theological term called 'perichoresis', which is the mutual indwelling and

interpenetration of Father, Son, and Holy spirit, each different and yet interpenetrating and mutually indwelling in each other. And since our love comes from God, so therefore our love must participate in God's way of loving.

So marital love is like God love within the Godhead, is perichoretic. Love is a relationship. Marriage is a relationship of mutual indwelling and interpenetration. Now divorce destroys perichoresis, it destroys the interpenetration and indwelling of each other and God hates divorce.

In real life, there is a tension between the vision of Genesis chapter 2, where the two will become one flesh and the Fall in Genesis chapter 3, because as a result of the Fall, the woman's desire will be for her husband. The desire means to control the husband, and on the other hand, the husband's tendency will be to rule over her. So therefore there's the ideal, which is one flesh relationship, and then there's reality which is basically the husband dominating and bullying the wife as it were. So this lays the seeds for divorce and acrimony within the otherwise designed to be perfect relationship.

Now to resolve this tension enter Paul, Ephesians chapter 5 verse 31,

*Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become **one flesh.***

That's the Genesis chapter 2 design and then verse 32,

*32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to **Christ and the church.***

So there's a new paradigm. The two shall become one flesh, but this refers to Christ and the church. What is Paul saying? So let's read Hosea chapter 3, verse 1.

The LORD said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes." 2 So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley. 3 Then I told her, "You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will behave the same way toward you."

The dramatic love story of Hosea is the dramatic love story between God and us. We like Israel do not deserve God's love. We have betrayed God time and time again. We have played the harlot with other gods and yet Hosea was asked by God and displayed that kind of supernatural love where he took huge amounts of his own treasure and crops and used that to redeem his undeserving wife who had hurt him to his core by going to bed with so many other different men. Most people will find it very hard to forgive their spouses for that and yet Hosea did that and it shows you the extent of God's love. Now the modern day Hosea is actually Jesus Christ. He's the one who paid with his life to redeem us. You see, when you look in a typical marriage, neither the husband sacrifice nor the wife's obedience will ever be perfect in this marriage. No matter how many marriage courses you go for. However, the cross brings in forgiveness, grace and the Holy spirit.

The first thing the wife will complain is that he doesn't sacrifice for me enough, he doesn't love me enough. And he will complain she doesn't respect me, she doesn't listen to me, we don't get on. But when you bring in the cross, the cross always allows a reset button at the foot of the cross. At the foot of the cross, we can be like Hosea and Gomer. We can start again. The past hurt, injustices are

all laid on the foot of the cross and we give each other a clean slate, simply because Jesus gave us a clean slate. Marriages with the cross at the center, marriages with both of you at the bottom of the cross will always have all the baggage's and all the sins of the past, which you have done to each other forgiven and washed away by the blood of Christ. And when you put the Christ in the center of our marriages then divorce will be a distant memory. That is a New Testament paradigm. That's the New Testament vision of us being in one flesh. It can only be done with Christ at the center. May God bless you as you meditate through this Gamma session.