

# You have Heard... But I say to You... 3: Divorce

## Introduction/Review

With the same authority Jesus used to rebuke the errors taught on murder and adultery, He also spoke strongly against their false teachings on divorce. In the first two (murder/adultery) Jesus identified the error as not taking the commands far enough. They rightly taught against murder and adultery as part of the Ten Commandments, but they were not teaching against the emotions and lusts that brought them about. They said nothing against immoral thoughts, lustful glances, outbursts of anger or cutting remarks. Jesus warned His own disciples that the instant any emotion is felt that would naturally lead to these sinful acts if not stopped, the command had been violated and there was a need to repent and confess.

Their error on divorce was different. Instead of not taking a command far enough, they were taking a principle much further than had ever been intended. They were teaching people that divorce was a simple matter of getting a certificate of divorce and divorcing his wife. They were taught there were no limits to the reasons used to receive a divorce, all they needed was a "*certificate of divorce*." Once they had this certificate, any divorce was lawful. Anyone could end his marriage any time for any reason.

In this case they went far beyond what God had revealed. As Jesus pointed out later (Mt 19), there was nothing in the Scriptures that justified this doctrine. God had made it crystal clear that marriage was a one flesh relationship (permanent) in the beginning (Gen 1-2). It was never a casual relationship to be entered lightly or ended at a whim. God told Israel He hated divorce (an act of treachery and violence).

*And this is the second thing you do: You cover the altar of the Lord with tears, With weeping and crying; So He does not regard the offering anymore, Nor receive it with goodwill from your hands. 14 Yet you say, "For what reason?" Because the Lord has been witness Between you and the wife of your youth, With whom you have dealt treacherously; Yet she is your companion And your wife by covenant. 15 But did He not make them one, Having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, And let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. 16 "For the Lord God of Israel says That He hates divorce, For it covers one's garment with violence," Mal 2:13-16*

This is a classic example of Jesus statement: "*unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*" The "*righteousness*" in their teaching on divorce was woefully lacking in fairness and equity. As God witnessed their breaking this covenant he saw treachery since *she is your wife by covenant*." They were in direct violation of the two commands the entire law hangs from. They did not "love the Lord their God with all your heart soul, mind and strength." They certainly did not love their neighbor (in this case their wife) as themselves.

Jesus did not forbid divorce. The teachers were not wrong that a certificate of divorce was necessary in order to have a divorce. But they were teaching a terrible doctrine by not limiting the reasons. Jesus made clear what God's expectations were.

*"Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' 32 But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery." Mt. 5:31-32*

Jesus narrowed the "*reason*" for divorce. He focused on the action and cause, and on the motivation and purpose. Jesus taught there was only one legitimate reason. A *certificate of divorce* must be for the cause of his wife's adultery. This and is the only valid reason for divorce. A *certificate of divorce* given for any other cause was just a piece of paper written by men and had no authority. If another marriage was entered into after such a divorce, it was not a marriage, just government sanctioned adultery.

Since God did not recognize the divorce, He did not separate the man from his wife. Therefore in God's eyes they were still married. When that man sought to join himself to another woman, God could not join them in marriage. He was still married to his first wife. Since the second woman could never be his wife, he was living in with her adultery. What God had joined together, God had not separated. Unless the motivation for the "*certificate of divorce*," was adultery, they were not divorced.

## Impact on Today

Sadly this passage has slowly evolved into a battleground of very different interpretations. As the divorce rates have soared in our culture the teachings of this passage have been ignored, or worse set aside through twisting and perverting His words. Many have sought for a way to understand Jesus' words in such a way that they do not mean exactly what they say. For this reason we must be especially careful to be true to the text and the words our Lord used.

First we will look at the text itself. The Textus Receptus and the Nestle text are identical so there are no textual issues in the passage. There is no controversy about Greek words. Since it has been over 500 years since the King James translation appeared, we would expect some subtle changes in vocabulary. But when we compare the words of the KJV (written in 1611) the ASV (1901) and the later translations, we see very little variation. "*Putting away*" has become "*divorce*." "*Saving for*" has become "*except for, reason or ground*" "*Fornication*" has become "*unchastity, marital unfaithfulness, or sexual immorality*." But the basic meaning of the passage has remained in all the translations and through all the centuries.

whosoever	shall put away his wife,	saving for the cause of fornication,	causeth her to commit adultery (KJV)
every one	that putteth away his wife,	saving for the cause of fornication,	maketh her an adulteress (ASV)
everyone	who divorces his wife,	except for {the} cause of unchastity,	makes her commit adultery (NAS)
anyone	who divorces his wife,	except for marital unfaithfulness,	causes her to become an adulteress (NIV)
whoever	divorces his wife	for any reason except sexual immorality	causes her to commit adultery (NKJ)
everyone	who divorces his wife,	except on the ground of sexual immorality,	makes her commit adultery (ESV)

Since they all say exactly the same thing with slightly different words, all we need to do is understand the words. Jesus began His teaching with the term “*whoever*.” He chose a Greek word that meant “*every class and every kind*” of divorce. Generally, when this word is used there are no exceptions.

“*pas*,... I. adjectivally,... a. *any, every one*(namely, of the class denoted by the noun annexed to *pas*);... *all* or *any* of the class indicated... b. *any and every, of every kind, ... 2. everything, (anything) whatsoever*;... *always, perpetually, ... in every condition, or in every matter, ... in everything, in every way, on every side, in every particular or relation,...*” (Thayer, p. 491-493; 3956).

The word means “*anyone or everyone*” in the “*class denoted by the noun*.” The grammar is very specific. Jesus used a present active participle to describe divorce. A participle in both Greek and English always takes an action described by the verb and changes it into a person(noun). So a participle is a “verbal noun.” For example, while watching a race, we can describe the action with verbs or participles. If we use a verb we say “*all the people who are running*.” If we use a participle we say “*all the runners*.” Using the same grammatical construction, Jesus changed the action of the verb: “*all the men divorcing their wives*” into a participle(noun) “*all the divorcers*,” or “*all the divorcing ones*.” Anyone and everyone who has made themselves a *divorcer*(by giving a certificate of divorce) must therefore give careful thought to these words. Gone is the idea of Jew and Gentile. Gone is the idea of those before or after baptism. Everyone means everyone. Everyone, anyone, whosoever who is in the class of *divorcers*.

No matter what other circumstances were involved, only one thing mattered to Jesus. Though multitudes put away their wives, there is only **one** exception clause. All divorcers are committing adultery if they remarry “*saving for*” or “*except for*” the cause of adultery.

“*parektos* a strengthened form of *ektos* lit., “outside,” (*para*, beside), is used (a) as an adverb, signifying “without,” 2 Cor 11:28; lit., “the things without,” I. e., the things happening without; (b) as a preposition signifying “except”; in Matt 5:32” (Vine’s NT:3924)



except for:  
*ektos* - outside  
*para* - beside  
*paraektos* - beside or outside of this group. “*saving; except*”

Anything “*outside and beside*” the cause of adultery brings the conclusion Jesus demanded. Everything outside of the “*cause of adultery*” is not a divorce God will honor. It is not a divorce at all because a divorce demands a separation and only God can separate(Mt. 19). The Greek term translated “*fornication, sexual immorality, or marital unchastity*” is the general term for any and all sexual activity outside of the marriage relationship. A husband and wife were created by God to enjoy all sexual activity and it is their exclusive privilege. Any sexual activity outside of marriage is described by this term. It also includes adultery, homosexuality, in short any sexual activity between people who are not married.

The word Jesus selected and translated “*cause*” is very unusual. It is the word “*logos*” which is almost universally translated “*word*,” or “*give account*” only here is it translated “*reason, cause, or ground*.” But if it were translated literally it still makes perfect sense. “*but I say unto you, that every one that puts away his wife, saving for the word of fornication, makes her an adulteress*.” Hence when someone is asked about the reasons for a divorce, they have only one word: “*fornication*.” He did not divorce for any other reason. This is a one word answer to the only reason giving a “*certificate of divorce*” would be accepted by God.

Without the “*word*,” “*cause*,” “*ground*,” or “*reason*” of fornication,” the “*divorced*” woman becomes an adulteress if she marries another and whoever marries her will also be committing adultery. The term “*makes her*” an adulteress is the general term for “*making*” or “*forming*” something.

“*poieo*... I. *to make* ... 1. ... a. with the names of the things made, *to produce, construct, form, fashion, etc.* ... *to create produce*: of God, as the author of all things...b. joined to nouns denoting a state or condition, it signifies *to be the author or, to cause* ...” (Thayer, p. 524-527; 4160)

Thus the true affect of this certificate of divorce is to “*be the author*” or, “*to cause*” his wife to become an adulteress. It doesn’t free her to remarry, it sets her up to become an adulteress if she remarries. This husband has forced his wife out the door with his certificate of divorce, and “*produced, constructed, formed, and fashioned*,” her into an adulteress. What kind of love is this? It truly is treachery to do such a thing. Yet not only is the woman who is presented with a certificate of divorce without adultery committing adultery if she remarries, but so also “*whosoever shall marry her when she is put away commits adultery*.” The one who marries her in these circumstances is also considered an adulterer.

### **The Exception is not Repeated**

It is also important to see that although there is an exception in the first part, there is none in the second.

Every divorcer except those who divorce for adultery makes their wife an adulteress. But **everyone** who marries a divorced woman commits adultery (no exceptions). Even the women divorced for adultery are still unable to marry. Everyone who marries a divorced woman (regardless of the reason including even adultery) will be committing adultery. As noted above, the Jewish leadership did not take this teaching lightly. It is important to note that of all the things Jesus discussed in this sermon, this is one of the few things they chose to take Him to task over.

## **The Pharisees came “testing” and “questioning” Jesus.**

This did not sit well with the Pharisees. Later they come “testing” and “questioning” Jesus about it. Their words are recorded in Matthew 19:1-11, with a shorter account in Mark 10:1-11. The Pharisees were prepared with their best arguments and intended to win this debate and shame Jesus. They knew from this sermon and from other statements (Lk 16:18), that Jesus taught a much stricter view of divorce. Their opening question sets forth their position (and evidently from the disciples reaction [19:10] the one commonly held in that day). They clearly believed the Law taught one could divorce “for any cause.” It is evident from the debate that they hoped to disprove the stricter view Jesus was teaching and discredit Him for binding something Moses had not bound.

The testing/debate began with the question “*Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all?*” Instead of a simple yes or no, Jesus as the master teacher, sought to make them think. He wanted them (and anyone else who was listening — including us today) to see the answer for themselves. His “*have you not read*” forced all to admit they had in fact read what He quoted and felt its force.

The point of Jesus quotation is a simple foundation truth. God created marriage the same time He created them male and female! Though Adam was made first and single, and spent some time alone with God and the animals, it was made clear to him that something was missing (Gen. 2:18-25). God then “*caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and he took one of his ribs.*” When Adam awoke the woman made from his rib was by his side, and he was already married. That this marriage was permanent was emphasized by the fact that they were one flesh.

That this was God’s intent in the beginning for marriage was so clear and obvious none of the Pharisees, anyone else listening, or anyone today can deny it. There was no provision or plan for divorce in God’s original intent. Since all other marriages are joined together in exactly the same way, Jesus conclusion was unassailable. “*they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.*” God joins each man and woman into a one flesh relationship. No man should seek to set that aside.

What conclusion did this force them to draw? How did this sit with their teaching that a man could divorce his wife for any cause? It was completely incompatible! There was no way to harmonize what they were teaching with God’s original intent for marriage. God wanted permanent marriage and they taught divorce for any cause. They didn’t even try to go any further with this line of reasoning.

So they asked a second question. Surely Jesus must be aware Moses gave them a command to give a certificate of divorce and send her away. Why did he do that if God hadn’t wanted them to divorce?

This time they were making a false assumption. They thought Moses had given this command with the intent of revealing God’s attitude toward marriage and divorce had changed after the fall. They assumed God was revealing His new attitude through this command. We can’t really blame them. Most of us make similar general conclusions when a command is given in Scripture. Since God revealed it through Moses, it must reveal His true feelings and attitude toward divorce.

But Jesus had a much clearer insight into the nature of this command than the Pharisees. He was present when the command was given and knew exactly what the intent behind it was. Jesus stated clearly that this command was not given to reveal God’s will or intent for the dissolution of a marriage. The truth is startling because it was not something we would normally conclude. Moses commanded this specific command regarding divorce “*because of your hardness of heart*”

Many today would like to know exactly what this hardness of heart was, but though Jesus revealed it, He did not explain it. It may have been the same hardhearted attitude manifested by his own disciples when they saw God’s true attitude toward marriage as Jesus revealed it. Their conclusion: “*It is more expedient not to marry*” revealed their own hard heart. Rather than do God’s will no matter what the cost, they would rather selfishly never marry at all.

We also see the hardhearted nature of man when Paul gave the command in 1 Cor. 7:10-11 repeating the Lord’s demand that they not depart. But then, instead of moving on, Paul told us what to do if they won’t keep this command. “*But unto the married I give charge, yea not I, but the Lord, That the wife depart not from her husband (but should she depart, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband); and that the husband leave not his wife.* Why else but man’s hard heart would Paul give a command, then a concession? It again revealed man’s hard heart on this subject.

There is something especially hardhearted in the entire concept of divorce “*for every cause.*” (Mal. 2:13-16). Those who put their wives away thought nothing about the ‘treachery’ and ‘violence’ this ‘putting away’ created. They did not care about the truth of the permanence of marriage, nor did they have any

concern to their neighbor as themselves. The treachery of breaking covenant, and the violence it caused their spouse and children meant nothing. Only the fulfillment of own lusts and selfishness.

We still see this same hard heartedness as people refuse to reconcile, leave their spouse and remain unmoved even when God's clear intent in joining them is quoted. But though we may never know exactly what was meant by the hardness of their heart, Jesus made one thing abundantly clear. Moses command could not be used as the Pharisees sought to use it! Moses command in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 did not express God's feelings or will. It revealed Israel's hard heart. That's all we can use it for today.

To fully drive this point home, Jesus again pointed back to His previous argument "*but from the beginning it was not so.*" Jesus simple affirmed that this command in the Law was obviously inconsistent with what God had revealed in the beginning. God had created Adam permanently joined to Eve. All their children were to have the same blessing. Nothing that occurred between the beginning and the giving of the Law had changed that. The only logical conclusion (and Jesus made it) was that something had changed with man, not with God!

Though some argue it was inconsistent for God to concede to Israel on a moral issue simply because of their hardness of heart, Jesus stated that's exactly what God did.

All of the points the Pharisees hoped to use against Jesus vanished before the power and logic of His teaching. Though they had tried their best, the Law had no power to undo what Jesus had taught on divorce. What Jesus had already taught on the subject still stood. The Law did nothing to remove or lessen it. He was not binding more than the Law for the simple reason that the Law had not dealt with God's true intent. Jesus then revealed God's true intent for divorce: "*I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, commits adultery: and he that marries her when she is put away commits adultery.*"

As far as Matthew and the Holy Spirit who inspired him, were concerned, this was the end of the debate. After Jesus made his decree the debate was over. The truth on divorce was clearly set forth. Those who love the Lord and seek to submit will accept it.

Though the Pharisees did everything they could to use the Law to contradict Jesus and discredit his words. Jesus destroyed their arguments. There was absolutely nothing in the Law of Moses to contradict or modify Jesus words. Even the Spirit makes this clear for after the debate with the Pharisees was over, His disciples asked Him about it again.

Perhaps they simply could not believe their own ears. Surely there must be some misunderstanding that Jesus would clear up for them. "*In the house His disciples also asked Him again about the same matter. 11 So He said to them, 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. 12 And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.'*" Mk. 10:10-12

As one can see from these final words in Mark, Jesus expected God's original intent of marriage to be obeyed by his disciples. All who marry must be warned that marriage is a permanent institution. Those who take this step, make the vows, and enter into covenant are bound by God for life to their spouse (Rom. 7:2-3). Jesus' command simplifies divorce. Only adultery can break the bond. Any remarriage after divorce not based upon adultery does not break the bond. That is why any subsequent relationship can only be adulterous.

- 1 What is the difference between what Jesus said about murder/adultery and about divorce?
- 2 What had they heard about divorce?
- 3 What did Jesus point to as the most important aspect of divorce?
- 4 Does the word "everyone" give any room for exceptions?
- 5 What is the literal meaning of the word cause?
- 6 What does the "divorced" woman become if she is not divorced for the word of fornication?
- 7 How does the divorcing husband "make her" an adulteress?
- 8 How do we know the Pharisees were deeply troubled by this teaching?
- 9 What happened in the beginning that should make it clear to all how God feels about divorce?
- 10 Since God joins a man and woman into one flesh what should man do?
- 11 What is their second question?
- 12 Usually when we see a command what do we conclude about what it teaches about God's will?
- 13 How does Jesus use "hardness of heart" to reveal it was not God's will?
- 14 Does Jesus explain what this hardness of heart was?
- 15 What did the disciples do to reveal that they still had some hardness of heart?
- 16 What did Paul say that also reveals a hardness of heart?