

Series: God & Man & Woman #820

Title: Genesis 2.24, Part 24

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world! When we were together yesterday we left off talking about direct, truthful, and hard words from Jesus Christ. He spoke these words to some Pharisees with others tuning in, including Christ's disciples. They have been recorded for us in Matthew's Gospel in this, the Holy Bible, and that means these are words also for us. Let's be attentive now to Jesus as we end this week together right here on *God Is*.

The subject, the topic, is divorce and remarriage. And we have come here to Matthew chapter 19 because we want to answer our question: what does God think about divorce? Is divorce acceptable to God and if so, is remarriage following divorce also acceptable to Him? We seek God's opinion on the matter of divorce and remarriage. And who better to ask than His Son Jesus Christ? In this sense the Pharisees have done us service because it is their question, meant to trap Jesus, which gives Christ the opportunity to answer us!

I hope that you have been following along here in Matthew 19. Today we come down to verses 8 and 9. Last time, in verse 7, we saw these Pharisees try to pit Jesus against Moses. Moses was (is) a revered man among the Jews. Moses was God's lawgiver. He is the paramount and well-respected figure of the Jew's past, present, and future. But there is a fatal flaw in their use of what Moses said. They said God *commanded* divorce through Moses. Totally false! (Absolutely untrue.) *No!* The Bible does *not* say that God *commanded* divorce!

Jesus boldly refutes the Pharisees' assertion that God commands divorce. Instead Jesus says that God *permits* divorce under a certain circumstance. And what is that specific, and narrow circumstance? It is a hardness of heart that results from unrepentant adultery in a marriage. I will repeat that and then show you this in the Bible. God *permits* divorce under a certain circumstance. He does not *command* divorce. He only *permits* divorce under a certain circumstance. And that specific and narrow circumstance is a hardness of heart that results from unrepentant adultery in a marriage.

So, let's crack open our Bibles to Matthew 19, verses 8 and 9. I am reading Matthew 19.8 and 9, ⁸ **[Jesus] said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. ⁹ And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.'**

Let's break down these sentences into some bite sizes. It will be easier to digest that way. Jesus begins, **"Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives..."** And let me just briefly say the emphasis here is on men divorcing their wives, because this is what was most common in Jesus' day. But by implication it also true that what Jesus says here applies to wives who divorce their husbands, which is common today.

And note that it was "hardness of heart" that permitted God, via Moses, to allow for divorce. This was certainly *not* God's design or intention and definitely not God's command. The very next words out of the mouth of Jesus tell us that: **"...but from the beginning it has not been this way."** *Again* Jesus emphasizes that marriage between one man and one woman, as one flesh, is to last one lifetime. That is the way it was from the beginning, in Genesis! Since it was their hardness of heart that caused God to permit divorce, we better understand what "hardness of heart" means.

And in the context, a context in which Pharisees who were serial adulterers (as we have covered on previous broadcasts and podcasts), a context in which Pharisees would divorce their wives for any reason at all in order to marry someone else, the hardness of heart refers to the sin of adultery.

The Pharisees were very guilty of ongoing and unrepentant adultery. That is, they cheated on their wives without ever acknowledging this as sin and seeking God's forgiveness *and* the forgiveness of their spouse; without putting a permanent end to their adulterous ways.

We see that "hardness of heart" refers to unrepentant adultery quite clearly when we come down to verse 9. Jesus adds this in Matthew 19, verse 9, **"⁹ And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for**

sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery. There is another bite size phrase I want to draw our attention to here: “except for sexual immorality.” What is sexual immorality? Simply put, sexual immorality as Jesus means it is ongoing and unrepentant adultery in a marriage.

The Greek word used for “sexual immorality” here in the original manuscripts is *porneia* [**pronounced por-nay-ah**]. That is a term that includes all illicit sex. In this case it refers to illicit sex by a married person. And by illicit I mean forbidden. As we all obviously know, even people who are far from Christians know, sex outside of marriage is illicit sex; it is forbidden sex. It is adultery. So that Jesus equates sexual immorality with adultery in Matthew 19:8. He uses them interchangeably. When we read Jesus in Matthew 19, verse 8 and He says sexual immorality He means adultery. So that we can read the text, **“And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for [adultery]...”**

And you will notice that here is the exception we have been building towards. Earlier in our series we have seen in the Bible how when one’s spouse dies the widow or widower is free to remarry. And we have seen how when a Christian spouse is abandoned by their non-Christian spouse, the believer is free to remarry. And now here, in the words of Jesus, we see how when there is ongoing and unrepentant adultery in marriage, the innocent spouse (the one who is *not* committing adultery) is free to divorce *and* (and) remarry. These four words of Jesus, “except for sexual immorality,” are very important.

Thus far I have been restating the truth Jesus speaks to us. But now, as Jesus would often do, I want to put what we have learned into a story so that I give you another way to think about this before we pause for the weekend. We will be coming back to these words of Christ on Monday so you do not want to miss that. Please be here at this time on this station or download the podcast from my website, godisministry.org.

And now is also a good time to let you know that I remember I have promised you a book recommendation last week! I commit to tell you about that now *next week* because, well as usual, I am short on time. So, book recommendations forthcoming next week. Stay tuned.

Alright, let me recount a true story that I am aware of (with names changed to protect confidentiality). This is a sad story about ongoing and unrepentant adultery (sexual immorality) in a marriage. This couple of which I speak both claim to be Christians. They never miss a Sunday at church, even now with joining their church services on-line from home in the pandemic. The husband’s name is Bob. Bob has been married to Beatrice for decades. And many years ago now Beatrice was stunned and saddened to find out that Bob, a truck driver, had taken up with another woman – a one night stand, he claimed, when caught – on one of his long haul drives.

With two young children at home, and with Bob the sole provider, as betrayed and angry as Beatrice felt, she knew that she could not live without Bob so, together, they went to see their pastor. Bob confessed his sin and expressed that it was a one-time slip up and it would never happen again. What he failed to disclose is that the young woman he slept with became pregnant and later gave birth to Bob’s baby. With the encouragement of their pastor, Beatrice forgave Bob and healing – in some measure – began in their marriage. Bob had been forgiven the sin of adultery by his wife Beatrice.

But then, when only just a few years had past, it happened again. And again, when confronted, Bob admitted to what he had been doing and sought forgiveness as tears spilled out of his eyes in front of Beatrice in the pastor’s office.

Each time his wife forgave him Bob would go along for a little while without any adulterous relationships, but through his work he would meet women and violate his marriage vows again and again. At last check he has been involved in over ten adulterous relationships (that we know of), and yet Beatrice remains married to Bob.

This sad (and aggravating) story is what ongoing and unrepentant adultery (sexual immorality) in a marriage is. Bob’s actions describe what is ongoing (continual, repeating) and what is unrepentant – no true change to his actions, despite emotional confessions. Bob has hardness of heart. Biblically, what is Beatrice to do about this? Find out next week on God Is!

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