

Just One Reason For Divorce?

One of the greatest controversial subjects concerning members of the Lord's church is divorce. What are scriptural grounds for divorce? There are many viewpoints but only one will stand in judgment, the one of which Jesus spoke. So what did Jesus say? We will now see.

In Matthew 19 the Pharisees came to Jesus and asked Him in vs. 3, *"Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for any cause?"* Jesus responded in vss. 4-6 and said, *"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."* This was His answer to their question. However, they responded and said. *"Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?"* Jesus, in response to their second question said, *"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; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery."*

The passage Jesus is speaking of is Deuteronomy 24:1-4, which allowed divorce, but the husband could not remarry his first wife. This was the stiff penalty that was meant to discourage divorce instead of encourage it. However, this law was no longer in effect, because Jesus made the distinction in Matthew 19 between what Moses said and what He said. Jesus does not permit divorce except for one reason: sexual immorality or fornication as other translations put it. This means sexual activity with anyone who is not your spouse! Someone may say that since Jesus included *"and shall marry another,"* it is only wrong when the divorcee or the divorced gets remarried. However, the question the Pharisees asked was not concerning getting remarried after the divorce. It was about the divorce itself. Jesus' answer to their first question (vs. 3) was no (vs. 6). The answer to their second (vs. 7) question was for fornication (vs. 9). That was it! Divorce in itself for any reason other than sexual immorality is wrong (cf. Malachi 2:16)!

So why is there so much controversy? Is it because Matthew 19 is hard to understand? No! It is just like any other false teaching. The scriptures are twisted to what an individual wants to believe. Also, questions are asked such as, "What if the husband is beating the wife or abusing the kids?" or "What if the husband or wife is put in prison for a long period of time?"

"Surely God isn't that strict is He?" No matter how many scriptures you may twist and no matter how many hypothetical questions questions you may ask, what Jesus said in Matthew 19 still stands and will judge us in the last day! *"He who rejects me and receives not my word has that which judges him. The word that I have spoken will judge hi in the Last day"* (John 12:48). It is as simple as that!

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