

Message #29

Deuteronomy 24:1-4

When most ministers talk about divorce there are two topics that they usually bring up. The divorce rate is skyrocketing and God hates divorce. We will talk about that later. But when one goes straight through all of the books of the Bible, especially the law of Moses books, it becomes evident that as the NIV study Bible states, “divorce was permitted and regulated” (*The NIV Study Bible*, p. 273). The Mosaic Law does not command divorce nor condone divorce nor forbids divorce, it regulates it.

Just this week, I finished reading the book of Ezra and in that book God demanded that His people divorce their mates (Ezra 10:3, 10-12, 18-19, 44). Some of them were married with children and yet they needed to divorce them. We must be honest with the Scriptures.

Now some churches almost make divorce an unpardonable and unforgiveable sin. They present almost a no grace possibility message. God does ordain marriage and it is a very serious and sacred covenant. But sometimes sinful people don't hit the bulls-eye of perfection.

When it comes to this subject, as all subjects, we want to be as Biblically accurate as we can be. Some ministers take a very rigid approach and others take a very liberal approach.

This is not new to our day. In New Testament times, there were two Rabbinical schools of thought on this subject. One was the school of Shammai and the other was the school of Hillel. They made lists of things that were legitimate for divorce. The school of Shammai was very restrictive and the school of Hillel was more liberal. Shammai said divorce was possible if the husband suspected his wife was unfaithful. Hillel said if a wife spoiled a dish or meal, the husband could divorce her.

So this debate is not new to us. We want to do our best to apply everything we know about this from all Scripture. We want to understand the whole counsel of God and that is what we will attempt to do for you today. Everything is in print and you can track this down yourself. What we see here is this:

GOD KNEW THAT HIS SINFUL PEOPLE SOMETIMES DO SINFUL THINGS AND HE GIVES THEM HIS GUIDELINES IN LIFE SO THAT THEY CAN STILL EXPERIENCE HIS BLESSINGS, EVEN IN MATTERS LIKE MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE.

God is very much involved in how His people live their daily lives. He is not a God who just creates the world and then expects people to live life and wing it on their own. He gives them His guidelines and regulations to follow so they may experience the blessings of God.

He knows His people are sinful and He knows they sometimes do sinful things. Thank God He is gracious and merciful for where would any of us be if He weren't. Now in this chapter there are a series of regulations about a variety of things in life and today we will look at one of the topics, which is divorce and remarriage.

REGULATION #1 – Law regulations concerning the divorce and remarriage of a spouse.
24:1-4

When we were in Florida, there was a couple interviewed on the news who had been married 60 years. The question that was asked was this - Was there ever a time in your marriage when you thought about divorce? They said the word “divorce” never was in our vocabulary, but the word “murder” was often in our vocabulary.

It doesn't matter how long you have known your mate. It doesn't matter how long you were engaged. It doesn't matter how you met or how you fell in love. **If a couple marries, sooner or later each mate will realize I am married to a sinner.** It won't be long until one realizes I am not married to a perfect person. The truth is we are all sinners so in any marriage what you actually have are two sinners living together who are trying to make it through life. That is one reason why it is not a bad idea if one chooses to remain single, which is exactly what Paul said.

It is interesting that Paul said any one who chooses to marry has not sinned, but you “will have trouble in this life” (I Cor. 7:28). Why did he say that? Because two sinners are living together and that is not all bliss. Sinners are sinners. Sometimes you will hear someone say they have the perfect marriage. There is no such thing because there are no perfect people.

It would be nice if all marriages ended “happily ever after” but the reality of it is, they do not. Sometimes the marriage falls apart and it doesn't work. God was aware of that and He made provisions for it. If a couple chooses to keep the Lord first in life and follow the word of God, then they can have a blessed life as husband and wife. But in many instances one or both drift from God and the relationship is anything but blessed. When a marriage falls apart, someone has a hard heart. The relationship has drifted from the word of God and there is always some sort of sin.

We are sinful people and God knew it when He entered into a relationship with us. Israel was a sinful nation and God knew that. So He set forward some relationship guidelines:

Guideline #1 - A man marries a wife and he finds no favor in her because of some indecency in her. **24:1a**

The matters brought up here by Moses are from the husbands' point of view. It is the husband who wants a divorce. But Paul expanded it in N.T. times to husbands and wives who want a divorce (I Cor. 7:10-11).

There was a study done recently in the world of psychology as to why men over 60 divorce their wives, after having been married to them for many years. Here were the answers they gave:

- 1) The wife is too controlling.
- 2) There is no physical intimacy.
- 3) The wife does not seem to appreciate the husband.
- 4) The wife neglects herself and doesn't care what she looks like.
- 5) Life is endless conflict.
- 6) The wife was unfaithful.

Moses doesn't tell us what the specific issue was here. What he says is that the wife did not please the husband and he found some "indecent" in her.

The verb "find" (mitzvah) indicates that this conclusion was discovered after the fact of the marriage (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 499). The husband in this case did not have knowledge of whatever the displeasing thing was before he married her.

The word "indecent" comes from a Hebrew word that means to cause "distress" (*Ibid.*, p. 718). The word cannot refer to adultery because adultery was punishable by death (Deut. 22:22). The word must refer, as Ryrie said, to some "repulsive behavior."

I am not sure what the repulsive behavior was. After the husband married the wife, he discovered something that wasn't good. Perhaps it was a moral issue or an attitude issue or a hygienic issue or personality issue. But whatever it was, it did not please the husband and he felt he could no longer stay married to her.

Guideline #2 - A man is to write a legal document of divorce and put it in her hand and send her away. **24:1b**

In order for there to be a divorce from God's calculation, there must be legal written documentation and it was not handled by an attorney. The Hebrew words "certificate of divorce" literally mean "a writing of cutting off."

The husband in this case, must write the bill of divorce and then hand it to the wife and send her out of his house. He must, himself, place it in the hand of the spouse. He must send her out of his house, which certainly would mean great economic loss and social shame.

This was not to be handled by an attorney. This was to be handled by the husband and wife. Today, most divorces are handled by third party attorney and the husband and wife sometimes don't see each other or talk to each other. That was not the way this was to be done.

In God's eyes, the person was not free to pursue another relationship with someone else until this happened. In other words, one could not say I am in the process of getting a divorce so this makes some other relationship okay. The release from the marriage did not occur until this document was written and given to the mate.

Guideline #3 - The divorced wife may leave the house and remarry another man. **24:2a**

We have already seen in Deuteronomy that the husband was not to demean or degrade his wife, but divorce her and let her go with some dignity (Deut. 21:14). He was not to mistreat her, but just let her go.

When the divorced woman left, she could remarry. The text does not promote nor condemn this woman remarrying another man. Jesus taught that if a divorced person married another, there was sin unless there had been adultery (Matt. 5:32; 19:9). But if there had been adultery, the party would be stoned. So what Jesus was basically saying is to the Pharisees is that they were sinners. If they had been divorced, they were proven sinners.

But if a woman were divorced, she could go and if another man wanted her, she could decide to remarry.

God is not some ogre who sentences people to a rigid life of never being remarried, as some would have you believe. We will point that out later.

In fact, I think Paul specifically addresses that in I Corinthians 7:27-28 when he says if someone who has been married before chooses to marry again, he has not sinned. Some ministers are real rigid on this point that if someone has been divorced, they must never remarry. They must go the life distance alone. I do not think that is consistent with the word of God and it certainly does not square with the grace of God, nor with this text in Deuteronomy.

What we have here is a woman was married and her husband divorced her and she goes and remarries another man.

Guideline #4 - The second husband divorces the wife or he dies. **24:2b**

Now the woman who was divorced remarries another man and he also decides to divorce her. The second man who remarried her probably would have been wise to talk to the first man who married her to find out what the problem was with her. Jesus met this kind of woman in Samaria. She had been married five times and was living with a man - John 4:18. He forgave her.

Apparently the second husband could not put up with her either so he decides to divorce her. He must also write a bill of divorce and put it in her hand and send her out of his house. This woman, in the Mosaic illustration, must have had some serious problems.

One of the great revivalist preachers refused to let a man marry his daughter because he said his daughter had a terrible temper and was too contentious. He told the man he would be better off marrying someone else.

Guideline #5 - The first husband who divorced her is not to remarry her. **24:3-4**

If a husband divorces his wife, she is gone forever. So the husband must be very certain that he wanted that marriage to end because once she was gone, she was gone. If she remarried another man and he divorced her or he died, then she could not remarry the first husband again.

That is an abomination to God and would bring a lack of blessing sin on the couple.

Many years ago, in the old westerns there was a husband and wife who married and divorced and remarried three times. Brenda Scott and Andrew Prine, who are both still living, she is 79 and he is 86, did that. She never did remarry another man so I'm not sure how that applies.

According to **verse 4**, if a husband remarried a former wife who had been remarried to another man: 1) It was an abomination to God; 2) It would be a sin in the land.

Now divorce was not the abomination; it was this that would make it an abomination.

Now having dealt with this text I want to tackle some questions:

QUESTION #1 – Where is this specific teaching on divorce found in the Bible?

Deut. 24; Ezra 10; Jer. 3; Malachi 2; Matt. 5:31-32; 19:3-12; Mark 10:6-12; Luke 16:18; Rom. 7:2-3; I Cor. 7. **Obviously this specific teaching is found in the book of Deuteronomy and Deuteronomy is part of the O.T. law.**

Now the O.T. law books reveal the righteousness of God and it shows all of us that we have not measured up to that righteousness. The O.T. Law, according to the Apostle Paul, shows we are all sinners and we are all guilty (Romans 3:19-20).

Adam and Eve had one commandment and they did not keep it or obey it. There is no way that any person has kept all of the legal, righteous commandments of the O.T. law. We have all broken the law and that shows we all need a righteousness that is only found by faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:21-23).

QUESTION #2 – Doesn't the Bible say that God hates divorce?

Most ministers are quick to point this out. **Yes, the Bible says that God hates divorce in Malachi 2:16.** Actually what God hated was the fact that some Israelite husbands had divorced their Israelite wives and had married foreign, idolatrous women who were worshipping false gods (Mal. 2:11, 14-15). Divorce is certainly not the ideal of God. When there has been a divorce, there have been many things that don't please God. God hates things that lead to a divorce such as addiction, abuse, abandonment and adultery. None of that pleases Him and He hates it.

When we were in Florida, one of the things I did was to go through some of the things God hates and I have catalogued 48 things that God specifically hates, and I can guarantee every one of us that there is not a person on this earth who has not done something in life that God hates.

Perhaps you have never gone through a divorce, but I guarantee you that you have done something God hates. If you have ever been proud, if you have ever shaded the truth, if you have ever shown partiality, if you have ever said something against a brother or sister, if you have not given your offerings with a proper attitude, if you have ever thought, said or done something God classifies as evil, you are guilty of doing something God hates.

QUESTION #3 – Isn't God divorced Himself?

Yes, God is divorced right now from Israel. We saw that in Jeremiah 3:1, 6-9. In fact, here is a real interesting point on this text in Deuteronomy. God is presently divorced from Israel and has married a new bride, the Church (Ephesians 5:32; Revelation 19:7-8). Once God has finished His program with the Church, He is going to reunite Himself with Israel again. She will become His wife once again. Just like Hosea took back Gomer, God is once again going to take back Israel.

QUESTION #4 – Didn't Jesus say that if a person was divorced he/she shouldn't remarry?

Actually no He did not say that (Matthew 19:1-12). What He said was when a divorced person remarries there has been adultery (Matt. 5:31-32; 19:9; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18; Rom. 7:2-3). When He said that, His disciples said in **verse 10** that if this were the case, it would be better not to marry. Jesus said in **verse 11**, "not all can accept this, only those to whom it has been given." The word "given" is the same word used for gift. Some people have a gift from God to remain single and others don't (I Corinthians 7:7).

QUESTION #5 – Is it the will of God that one divorce?

We may only cite one example where it was the will of God to divorce and that was in Ezra. The normal will of God is that there would not be a divorce. The will of God is that one maintain one's marriage for the glory of God.

We know that Jesus brought up the adultery issue as being grounds for divorce (Matt. 5:32; 19:9) and Paul brought up the abandonment issue as being grounds for divorce (I Cor. 7:15). We also would suggest that abuse and addiction would be grounds, but the ideal of God would be that there would not be a divorce.

QUESTION #6 – Suppose you have been divorced and are remarried, what is God's will for your life?

First of all, if there has been a divorce and remarriage, there probably has been adultery. Adultery is forgivable and is not the unpardonable sin. Many of the Corinthians had been in this very situation and were now washed and justified and sanctified (I Cor. 6:9-11).

The will of God for you is that you stay in your present relationship and live out your life for the glory of God (I Cor. 7:20). Whatever your present situation, if you are remarried, then live out your days with your present spouse for the glory of God.

QUESTION #7 – What if you have been divorced and would like to remarry, would it be sinful?

Paul specifically answers that very question in I Corinthians 7:27-28, it is not a sin to marry and it is not a sin to remarry.

God understands that His people have sin issues and He is an amazing, gracious, merciful God. No matter what the past or the sin, one may still experience His blessings by following His word and may God help us to do that.