

The Background to the Pharisees' question, v.2

- I. The background behind the Pharisees' question was the unquestioned belief in rabbinic teaching in the *lawfulness* of divorce based on Dt 24.1. The only point of real dispute concerned the grounds. There were two schools of thought.
- II. Also in the background was their own sinful intent, v.2. They questioned Jesus *in order to test Him* (cp. Mk 1.13).

Two questions, vv.2-3

- I. *Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?*
 - A. The question of the Pharisees is not a question about the grounds, but about the lawfulness (cp. Mt 19.3ff).
- II. *What did Moses command you?*
 - A. Jesus turns the questioning upon them and reminds them that all matters of faith and practice must be settled by the Word of God.

Two replies, vv.4-9

- I. The Pharisees' reply. *Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.*
 - A. Moses did command that a bill of divorcement be given to the woman in a case of divorce, but this was no command for divorce. This legislation in no way sanctioned or approved of divorce. It only sought to regulate the aftermath.
 1. Moses' command presupposes divorce but doesn't address divorce. It addresses the woman's need for protection after the divorce.
 - B. What God had given as a civil regulation to limit the ill-effects of a divorce, they had turned into a divine sanction for divorce.
- II. Jesus' reply does two things. 1) it exposes their erroneous interpretation; 2) it brings God's purpose and intention for marriage to bear upon their question.
 - A. Their appeal to Dt 24.1 was erroneous.
 - B. Jesus directs them back to creation and declares God's original intention for marriage. He uses Gen 1.27 and 2.24, both of which occur before the fall into sin which Moses' command presupposes.
 - C. This teaches us several things about marriage.
 1. Marriage is the blessed union of one man and one woman.
 2. Marriage is the union of a man and a woman which God establishes by His blessing upon it.
 3. Marriage is permanent and indissoluble.

- D. Marriage is God's institution, not man's, and therefore our marriage ethics must be based, not on a concession to human failure from Dt 24, but upon God's pattern in creation when marriage was instituted and sanctioned.

A private lesson, vv.10-12

- I. Jesus' teaching had made the disciples uncomfortable (cf. Mt 19.10). But this only shows how influenced they were by the world and how much they needed Christ's teaching.
- II. To that end, Christ added two more points to what He'd told the Pharisees.
 - A. Remarriage after an unbiblical divorce is a breaking of the 7th commandment because the divorce was not properly grounded in the eyes of God (cf. Mt 5.32; 19.9).
 - B. In the unfortunate instance of unfaithfulness or desertion (1Cor 7.15) on the part of the husband, the wife (contrary to Jewish law) also has the right to pursue a divorce—which is effectively another protection for the woman similar to Dt 24.1.

Instruction about God's plan for marriage

- I. We should all weigh well what Christ says about God's design and purpose for marriage because our marriage will either bring us some of life's greatest joys (when entered upon and lived according to God's instructions) or some of life's greatest miseries (when we ignore God's blessing and design).
 - A. Does your marriage manifest to the world that you're a *Christian* couple? Is God honored by your marriage? Is Christ visible in it?

Comfort about God's marriage to us

- I. Marriage was instituted by God to be a picture of His relationship to us as His Bride (Eph 5.32).
 - A. This is why God hates divorce (Mal 2.13-16), because divorce, and the unfaithfulness which leads to it, brings His relationship with us into disrepute and suggests He will divorce His Bride.
- II. But in spite of our failures in our marriages, we must *comfort ourselves* that God will not fail in His marriage to us.
 - A. He will never desert us (Isa 49.14-16), He will never allow His relationship with us to be breached by another (Jn 10.28; Rom 8.38-39), and He will never divorce us—no, not even for our sins of unfaithfulness and desertion. Instead, He will bring us back, so undying and sanctifying is His love (2Tim 2.13; 1Jn 1.9; 2.1; Rev 2.4-5; Hos 2.5-7).