

Marriage and Divorce in the Bible – Sermon on the Mount

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Welcome Home

Do you ever find yourself searching for something bigger than you? For a community to be a part of? A place founded on truth and love. A place to worship the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, and the Son of God. Welcome to Founded in Truth, where we're more than just a fellowship. We're a family. So welcome home. Shabbat Shalom. Shabbat Shalom.

Excited to see everybody this week. One day we look forward to fellowship, reset, reflect on the week, and reflect on where we're going. And this one day promotes one thing, and that is our God reigns. So that's what today's about.

Deuteronomy states the Sabbath was given to cause us to remember our exodus from slavery. By whom? By the Redeemer. That's what today represents. And I'm so happy to be here with you today to celebrate that with joy and with peace.

The Third Antithesis

Let's jump into Matthew chapter five. We're continuing the sermon on the Mount. So if you could turn with me to verse 31. We're making our way through this sermon that the rabbi of rabbis preached on this hill.

In verse 31, Yeshua is continuing his dialogue and he approaches his third antithesis here where it's almost random because he brings up something out of nowhere. And he brings up divorce and marriage and he says:

It was also said, whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce. But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

So here we are at this section of scripture. Yeshua is weighing in on divorce. He's weighing in on sex, adultery, marriage. And this is a hard message. Last week we spoke about Jesus and sex and how Yeshua weighed in on the topic of lust and sexual desire. And that's a topic, right?

A Difficult and Personal Topic

This is not simply a topic. This is something that affects people. It affects our relationships, and that's what makes this message slightly intimidating, and I'll be honest about that. And it affects people who are not married. It affects people who are married. It affects people who are divorced. It affects people who might want to be divorced. It affects people who might want to be married.

So I just want to let you guys know that I will not do this topic justice today. But I'm going to do my best and I hope that you will join me as we explore the words of Yeshua, no matter the risk or assumptions that go along with it.

Before we get started, I do want to give a shout out to some of the resources that are great if you wanted to go deeper on this subject. One is a good friend of mine, Matt Knapper. He is a pastor over at Beit Shalom Fellowship in Louisiana, and he has a master's in Old Testament theology, just got accepted to a PhD program in biblical studies, and we're honored to have him at Sukkot this year. So I'm truly excited about that. He has done many, many in-depth study messages, and we've had many conversations about culture, context, ancient Near East, marriage. And so yeah, highly recommend checking them out online. And there's also a book by David Enstone Brewer called **Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible**. And if there's one book I can recommend about this topic, that would be it by Enstone Brewer.

The Heart of the Kingdom

So we're going to look at what Yeshua is saying here and we're going to look at why he's saying it. And we're going to look at the context that surrounds him saying these words. And we're going to look at the world that he is specifically saying it to. And my hope for this message today is the same hope that I believe Yeshua had when he gave it. That the oppressed would see freedom and that those who are weak would have an advocate and that those who are

vulnerable would be given security and that those who domineer over others would have a wake-up call and repent and that those with hardened hearts would have mercy.

We're continuing the series titled "Collide" and it's a series in the Sermon on the Mount as we explore the first recorded sermon of Yeshua. And you have this rabbi who's going around teaching in synagogues and he's making disciples from the unwanted, and what is he preaching? Specifically in Matthew's account, what is the one message that he preaches consistently?

The kingdom, the kingdom of God is near, the kingdom of heaven is near. And the fullness of God's reign, mercy and justice, and eschatology is being birthed into earth right now, and it's happening before your eyes, and creation will never be the same again.

And this is his central message. And the Sermon on the Mount is a portrayal of what a person yearning to experience this kingdom, this reign on earth lives like. Yeshua tells us what a kingdom person looks like and the goals that we should have if that is our pursuit, the focus that we should have. And Yeshua is showing us how to live in such a way that represents heaven as it collides with the world around us.

We are [Jeremiah 31](#) people whose relationship with God is based on love and mercy and forgiveness. And this is a relationship and a covenant where we don't simply have the Torah, but the Torah has been internalized in our hearts. And the Sermon on the Mount is a message about that and what a person with God's covenant and Torah and promises written on their heart looks like.

Standards of the Heart

And so we spoke about anger a few weeks ago and how the standards of Yeshua, the standards that he has for the human heart are very daunting to the world around us. We spoke about lust and how merely dwelling on objectifying another human being for your own desires breaks the commandment of adultery. Just like that.

And truly radical ways of seeing things. And in each of these examples, Yeshua calls out one thing. He's trying to focus on one thing. And what was that one thing?

Okay, yeah, I know adultery and you're not supposed to mess with another man's wife. And I know anger and you're not supposed to murder someone. I mean, yeah, you don't pull out a gun and shoot. You're not supposed to shoot somebody. But I say, what? What's he focusing on? If you do it in your heart, then you've done it.

There's no room in God's kingdom for a heart like that. And that's a hard one, for sure. And Yeshua says, listen, your actions are great, but I want your heart. And I want your heart or nothing else. That's it.

Divorce in Focus

And here we have Yeshua's most radical comment about what? Divorce. Divorce. And he's consumed with the level of fidelity in a covenant relationship.

You've heard it said, whoever wants to divorce their wife, give them a piece of paper. That's what you should do. If you want a divorce, you've got to give them a piece of paper. But I say, unless adultery has taken place...

Okay, so first, what is the context of this? Who is he speaking to within the literal context of what Matthew is telling us? Men or women? Your wife. So he's speaking to men at this point. So it's important. Keep a pen in that. It's important.

Unless your wife, men, commits adultery, you are forcing her to do it by giving her an illegitimate divorce. That's what he's saying. If you divorce your wife illegitimately, then it doesn't count. And if she goes off and marries another man, then she's committing adultery. And it's not her fault. It's yours. You caused adultery to enter into your marriage because the divorce was illegitimate, according to Yeshua. Oh, yeah, but no, this is what Yeshua's saying. You've caused your wife to commit adultery. That escalated quickly.

And now we're going to explore this and we're going to explore what Yeshua says about the topic of divorce and marriage both here and in [Matthew 19](#). And if you brought your Bible today, go ahead and turn to [Matthew 19](#) because we're going to spend a lot of time there. That's where Yeshua says this and gives a broader context. He gives us more words, which is good.

And we're also going to visit what Paul says about divorce briefly. But before we go ahead with what Yeshua said and what Paul said in his letter to Corinth, we need to go back.

Returning to the Torah

Let's go back. What is Yeshua quoting in the Sermon? The Torah. He's expounding this interpretation, this better application of God's law. So let's go back there and see what the Torah says, what God's commandments say about divorce. Everybody excited? Awesome.

So the Torah seems to give a ton of information regarding this topic. Tons. I can tell who the Bible geeks are by the little snickers. Because it doesn't. It does not. It was a joke.

This topic is mentioned twice in God's Torah. And there are more details in the Torah about what to do if you find some mold in your house than there are about the topic and the details and the specifics of divorce and marriage. This should be a wake-up call for us.

And the Torah does this in many different directions. And I've always wondered: dang it, I just want a checklist here. Well, the assumption is that you already have a clue of how big of a deal divorce is and how big of a deal marriage is. That's the writer's intention there. We shouldn't have to cover that. You know what a divorce is and what it isn't, and so on.

But there is one section. The first appearance of the process of divorce and the breaking up of a marriage covenant is actually found in Exodus chapter 21. So you can turn Exodus chapter 21 with me. This is a great verse. It's a big deal. [Exodus 21.10](#). Everybody get there? [Exodus 21.10](#).

The First Law on Divorce

[Exodus 21.10](#) states:

If he marries another woman, second wife, he must not deprive the first one of her food, of her clothing, or of her marital rights. And if he does not provide her with these three things, she shall go free without any payment of money.

So this chapter is actually dealing with something we call indentured servitude, often translated as slavery. This chapter is dealing with how you treat a servant status person in your life. So this takes place a long time ago in a very strange culture to us in the late Bronze Age. It's kind of hard for us to wrap our minds around indentured servitude or slavery in this context — having a people that are similar to a full-time employee with you all the time. And they have a vow to keep or they have a contract to keep where they are your servant for a certain amount of time and then they're let free, and so on and so forth. Lots of dynamics.

That's what this chapter is dealing with. It's dealing with if a man takes on a second wife who is a servant. So let's say a family went through tough times, it was a famine, just things that we can't comprehend, and a daughter is essentially traded or sold to be a man's wife. Very foreign culture. If a man accepts a second wife, he may not deprive his first wife of food, shelter, or conjugal rights. Sex. Can't do it. And if he does this, she can leave. The marriage is over and she can go out, keeps her dowry, keeps everything. Man doesn't make anything.

Who does this commandment benefit? You want to know how radical the Bible is for its time? Who does this commandment benefit? The woman. The woman. Whose dignity does it shield? The woman's. And this was a huge deal.

So this people in this context were entrenched in a patriarchal norm. In a time period where having multiple wives was the norm. Not only that, but you could buy multiple wives. This was a common practice in the ancient Near East. So in a society where a man can obtain a wife as if it's property, he can also proceed to discard this wife as if it was just property. And this commandment is intentionally given so that it does not happen. God says, no, this will not take place for my people. And this was common in ancient Assyria and Babylon. Some cultures, you didn't even need a bill of divorce to break a marriage up — just walk out. Or you could tell her, "I divorce you," and walk out of the house. Bye!

And we see that God gives Israel this law that was meant to cultivate a people after his heart, a people of justice, a people of righteousness, a people of mercy, a people who would not exploit those who are in a weaker role or position in society. This commandment was put in to protect women from neglect and abuse.

Protected from Neglect and Abuse

So if a husband consistently refuses to give his wife shelter, clothing, or sex... He is neglecting her, according to the Bible. These are basic needs, but it goes a step further. Like, a shelter is a home. And clothing is a means of dignity, covering. And sex, men, this is saying, men, you're not in charge of that. And Paul actually says the same thing later. You're not completely in charge of that. It goes into conjugal love — the entire scope that surrounds those intimate moments: the security, the embrace, the love, the kindness, faithfulness, the promise, the respect that is shared. Throughout conjugal love is something that God commanded husbands must — this is bare minimum — must give their wives.

And when a husband fails to give these things to a woman he took an oath to, the relationship is abusive. Period. It turns to neglect and it turns into an abusive relationship. How does it not? How is it not you're misusing a covenant of marriage if these things are not part of it? You're mistreating it, you're exploiting it, and it produces the mistreatment of another human being. It's abuse. It's neglect.

And so here in [Exodus 21](#), what caused this marriage to end? Was it a signature on a piece of paper? Was it a divorce? Now the marriage is broken. No. No, this is telling us that the marriage ended because of the husband's actions or inactions. If there's a signature on a piece of paper, it's just testifying of that. It's already broken. Already broken when a husband breaks his marriage vows.

Now what's fascinating about this verse is it does have to do with slaves or servants, which causes some to employ this line of thinking that somehow these concepts do not apply to us since we're not slaves or spouses. I've heard this argued. It baffles me. Yeah, but that doesn't apply to me because that's not talking about me. I'm a free man. My wife's a free woman. So you're trying to argue that you shouldn't provide the basic needs for your wife because technically it doesn't apply to you?

If So, How Much More

So there is a form of hermeneutics that predates the first century. And it goes something along the lines of, if so, how much more? And repeat that after me, because when you see it in the Bible, you go, whoa, that's amazing. Or in any type of Jewish literature, if so, how much more? Great. Learned some biblical studies here you can use. We see this a lot in the New Testament. And in other words, if a situation happens here, and this application for this situation holds, then how much more should it apply over here in this situation that may not be technically related? But it's still kind of the same thing.

So if we found a commandment that said you must wear a helmet when you ride a skateboard — good example, right? — the commandment says we wear a helmet when you ride a skateboard. You wouldn't say, "Oh, you know, I'm riding a motorcycle, so this commandment doesn't apply to me." Technically it doesn't, because it's talking about a skateboard, and so then we employ this form of hermeneutics that's very common even before the first century. We'd employ, if so, how much more? So if so, you have to wear a helmet when you ride a skateboard. How much more would you wear a bigger, stronger, higher quality helmet on a motorcycle? You see how that goes.

It's like case law where a precedent sets a new application. And if you must supply the basic needs and the most basic emotions to a servant that you're married to, how much more are the needs that you must supply physically and emotionally to a free woman that you're married to? Kind of ups the game a little bit when we look at it like that. If God protects the free woman like this, to this level, how much more does God protect the slave and free woman? This is what God is saying in Exodus.

Now turn with me over to [Deuteronomy 24](#). This is the second place in the Torah where divorce is approached in some form of biblical basis. [Deuteronomy 24](#), verse 1. Everybody good so far?

Centuries of Dogma

Guys, this is a topic that's hard, and if you can't tell, slightly nervous, because I'm not nervous about the Word of God, and I'm not worried about the verses and what the verses are going to speak. I know that whenever we open the Word of God for subjects like this, we come against centuries, centuries of dogma that has been implemented through an individual or a single social class's benefit, selfishly, to put others down and remain in control over others. And when you threaten that, there is always backlash. And I believe that this topic, specifically the words of Yeshua, have been taken out of context. They have been furthered in an agenda for some selfish pursuit, and it has enslaved people in their emotions and in their lives.

So [Deuteronomy 24](#), verse 1. When a man takes a wife, if then he marries her. So when a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes, she finds what? Because he has found some indecency in her. Found what? So the indecency is caused to the unfavorable. And he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of the home, and she departs out of his house, and then she goes and becomes another man's wife, and the latter husband hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband who sent her away may not take her again to be his wife after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the Lord.

Just so you know, that is all one sentence. The translation — so this commandment is actually in the context of what we just read, from verse 1 to when the period ends. It's actually not dealing with marriage. The commandment in this context is actually dealing with remarriage. That's the context of [Deuteronomy 24](#) — it's about remarriage. This is what you do if all these things happen, this is what you do if you're gonna remarry, or this is what you don't do if you're gonna remarry. This is the laws about remarriage, but...

The First Century Debate

Verse 1, right here — verse 1, when a man takes a wife and marries her, and she finds no favor in his eyes because he found something indecent in her. Verse 1 has produced one of the biggest debates in the first century at the time of Yeshua. And it was dissected and assertions were made and interpretations were given, fueled from personal agendas of man. And if a man finds what? Just so we have it on our brains. What's he found in this verse? Some indecency. He can divorce her, right? Right?

So what's the big question here? What's indecency? You guys could battle it out in the first century debates, which we're about to dive into. You're ready. What does indecency mean?

So in the first century, there were two prominent rabbis who had significant followings, and their interpretations of this verse specifically fueled a buzz in a culture and society revolving around this topic of divorce and separation. And again, I would submit that this verse was never intended to be used to justify grounds for divorce, but to lead into a discussion about remarriage. But that's neither here nor there.

So one of these rabbis was named Rabbi Shammai, and he interpreted this verse in the context of [Exodus 21](#), the only other verse in Torah that specifically talks about grounds for divorce—with the mistreating, neglect, and abuse, essentially, of a wife. And he said that this verse, [Deuteronomy 24:1](#), is speaking about infidelity in the marriage. Adultery has taken place, and that is the indecency that has caused a man's favor to fall off. There's no other interpretation.

There was also another school of thought that followed the rabbi by the name of Hillel. Rabbi Hillel is a very famous rabbi. We actually have a sandwich named after him at the Passover Seder, if you remember. Hillel took a much broader, more liberal view of this verse and chose not to consider [Exodus 21](#). [Exodus 21](#) speaks about cases where a woman might get a divorce, but it really doesn't speak about marriage in general. And so we're like, "Well, what about [Deuteronomy 24](#)? Is there anything there?" So Hillel looked at this first and he said, "I'm not going to dismiss [Exodus 21](#); it seems to be something completely separate from this interpretation." He says that divorce can happen as soon as a woman loses favor in your eyes. What's an indecent thing? Anything that causes you to lose favor.

And Shammai said sexual infidelity is the only thing that constitutes indecency for a man to divorce his wife. Rabbi Hillel stated if your wife burns your toast, that's pretty unfavorable, thus it causes indecency in the marriage, thus you can divorce her. I'm not joking—that was the example: burn your toast. Rabbi Akiva said if you don't think your wife is pretty anymore, you can divorce her.

The Any Cause Divorce

This clause, this teaching by Rabbi Hillel, was known as the "any cause divorce." Why? Because you can divorce for any cause. Insane. It's absolutely insane. Hillel seems to view Torah as only supporting men's ability to divorce. They can divorce for any reason at all, any cause, just because they feel like it. What type of world would we be molding if this was accepted? Especially a world that's supposedly full of God's people reflecting His image.

But this was a legitimate debate in the first century, and everyone wanted to sway everyone else to their side. It was like election year when you go in and—I know no one in here ever tries to

pick fights and try to convert people to their political party during election year. But some people do. I'm friends with y'all on Facebook, I know. This was the topic of debate in the first century, and they would fight and argue: my side's right, no, your side's right.

Jesus Enters the Debate

And so that's when we enter into Matthew chapter 19. If you turn to Matthew chapter 19, Yeshua is making his way down from Galilee on this huge trek to Jerusalem. Why? Because this is the place where he's going to die in order to conquer sin, death, and evil, be resurrected, and be seated at the right hand of God, ruling this new creation that has been birthed in the world through himself. And so the Pharisees seem to have sent groups to try to corner this new, up-and-coming rabbi. What does he think? We've heard all these radical things about this guy. What does he think?

And so the text says: "Now when Jesus finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan, and large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. And the Pharisees came to him, and they asked him, 'Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?'"

Now that should sound familiar now that we have the context behind what they're asking. Is it true? Do you agree with the house of Hillel on this? Do you think that we should embrace this, right?

And he answers: "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, and they shall no longer be two, but they shall be one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.'"

And they said to him, "Why did Moses command us to divorce and send our wives away?"

They Came to Test Him

So you notice that who's committing adultery kind of shifts a little bit in [Matthew 19](#) according to Matthew. But whoa. So we have Yeshua's short, abbreviated assertion on divorce in the Sermon on the Mount, [Matthew 5](#). But here he expounds it for us, gives a little bit more dialogue. And he's saying the same thing, but with more words. And Yeshua seems irritated, as he is many times with the Pharisees. He's irritated by this debate that's brought to him.

So he proceeds to do what he always does: not answer the question directly, but explain what he believes will address the root of the issue. The root of the issue isn't the workflow, the specifications, the details, or the checklist of what has to happen to get a divorce. That's not the issue. If you're focusing on that, then you're part of the problem.

Before we go any further, why are they asking him this? Verse 3—what are they wanting to accomplish? "Oh, Rabbi, can you give us this great wisdom? We really want to learn. We trust you. We follow you. Can you tell us what you think?"

Is that what verse 3 says? No. They came and tested him by asking. They wanted to test him. So what was the motivation behind this question? Was it good or bad? You think it was edifying? Like they were thinking, "Yeah, this is going to be an edifying answer. I can't wait"? No, this is setting the foundation for how Yeshua responds. They wanted to test him. They wanted to get him involved in this debate about whether a man could, by God's law, be justified in being everything a man should not be. What do you think, Yeshua? And Yeshua responds to that.

And these are Pharisees. These are the top graduates of Bible college and seminary. These are the guys with the big PhDs behind their names. And Yeshua starts out by asking, "Haven't you guys read your Bible?" Did you catch that? These are the professors. "Hey, haven't you read your Bible? Do you know what your Bible says, right?"

What Makes Us Different

And instead of just talking about marriage, Yeshua goes into the purpose of mankind as the foundation of what it means to be human. And so he turns to [Genesis 1](#) and recounts the creation story that we're hopefully familiar with, where God creates mankind. What's the Hebrew word for mankind? It's important. Adam. God creates Adam, mankind. And out of Adam comes—out of one comes what? Two. Two. Male and female. And these are supposed to be his image bearers. These are the ones that are going to reflect his reign on the world and go out and expand throughout the world and create more image bearers.

And then what happens? These two become what? And then what happens? They produce more image bearers, right? And this is chapter 1. But what's the difference? I mean, is this the only creation? Is this the only species that does that, that is able to come together and procreate and have more? No, I mean, anteaters and honey badgers can do the same thing. Last time I checked, right? So what makes mankind, Adam, different from a honey badger and an anteater?

That's when Yeshua turns to chapter 2 to further explain this. He says that a man should leave his mother and father and hold fast to his wife so that they will no longer be two, but they shall

become one flesh. There's something uniquely different between animals and humans in this regard. Humans were meant and have the ability to verbally enact a lifelong covenant vow to their partner. Honey badger can't do that. They don't do that. We do. And that's what makes us unique.

The Covenant Vow

And when this is accomplished, the two are no longer seen as what? One. And this starts a family in God's eyes. Doesn't matter if you have kids or not. This starts something special: one flesh. The goal is to become one. There's a huge design behind this, and marriage is supposed to be a reflection of God's covenant nature.

And Yeshua is referring back to this as the foundation of his formal response to this ridiculous debate. "Haven't you read your Bibles? Marriage is sacred. Haven't you read your Bibles? Marriage reflects the very nature of God's covenant status with the world and with creation. Marriage was meant to be a lifelong, rock-solid, weighty covenant. It was meant to be built on love, mercy, forgiveness, peace, and commitment. It was not meant to be broken and tossed around at every whim. At the beginning, this was one of the first things that God gave and implemented into creation. Haven't you read your Bibles? You're having this stupid debate. Any cause? Do you agree that you can shatter this for any reason at all?"

And the Pharisees respond, "Of course we read our Bibles. Of course we read them. We get the Torah. We study this every day. We are the almighty Pharisees. Haven't you read your Bible, Yeshua? Why did Moses command us to divorce and send our wives away? Huh? Huh? Why? Why did he command that?"

What was Yeshua's response? "Because of the hardness of your heart, Moses commanded you to divorce."

What Moses Commanded

Look at the difference. These are two different words. The Pharisees presented divorce as a commandment. As if it's commanded. As if you have fulfilled some great and mighty and righteous mitzvah if you divorce your wife under whatever circumstances you agree to.

And Yeshua says, no, Moses didn't command anything. He didn't command you to do anything. The option was allowed because your hearts are so hardened that you have no capacity for mercy, grace, and integrity within the bounds of sacred covenants. You're allowed to. Yes, not

commanded to. Quit looking for a checklist of how you can become more righteous in God's sight. Quit fabricating one. And if you're going to shatter that God-imaging covenant with your spouse, it better not be for any cause. It better be for a darn good reason. And he stresses this point by making mention of adultery. Like, if you think the union of marriage that God sealed into your life with a spouse can be undone because she burnt your toast and you pursue another wife and you send your wife away, you have allowed and you are responsible for the adultery within your own marriage because it's still active. And your wife's now with another husband, another man, and it's your fault. Not her fault. She's an adulterer, but it's your fault. And you're responsible for the poor schmuck who marries her. That's your fault too. All these adulterers are there and you're responsible for it. Sin's on you. Dang. Dang. Wow.

In the Beginning It Was Not So

See, in God's kingdom—I believe what Yeshua is saying is in the beginning when heaven and earth fully are merged and God's reign is fully accepted, there is no divorce. Why? Because husbands love their wives and because wives honor their husbands. That's why. In the beginning it was not so. There was no need for Adam and Eve to have a commandment or allowance or a Torah command of divorce. They had their priorities straight because God had fully engulfed creation and they were living under that reign.

Wives, take this moment. Soapbox—let your man lead. Let him lead. Support him. I promise you that your husband struggles with anxiety about how he's leading the family and about whether he's taking care of you enough, or at least he should. If a husband is truly pursuing the covenant and his role and his calling, this is an anxiety and a stress that is on his heart daily. And he will not tell you that. Encourage him. Support him. Get behind him.

Husbands, love your wives. Support your wives. Lead your wives. Show your strength through your love. There's a phrase for that nowadays. We say, "man up."

Popular Views on Divorce

Now, in the verses in [Matthew 5](#), as well as [Matthew 19](#) and Mark, they've been viewed in many different ways. And one of the more popular views based on this verse is saying that adultery is the only reason to divorce. That's it. And this has been a very popular view. It's that view. Anyone familiar? Ever heard this view? Maybe a couple of times? So that's one view, and it's a very popular view that's held in many Christian denominations and churches. And if a spouse is in a situation of abuse or neglect, then according to this view, they cannot divorce their spouse.

The spouse being physically abused or sexually abused is not a good enough reason to divorce. And this view would argue: yeah, that's bad. Like, those are not good circumstances. So she should separate from him and leave him for safety, but they're still married and they can never divorce because if she divorces him, then she's an adulterer. This is the view, the common view.

So you being beaten verbally, emotionally, sexually abused, and wanting to separate yourself for reason of safety and divorce—that lays the foundation for you being an adulterer, according to this view.

I feel this view has a lot of weaknesses in how to view this topic within what Yeshua is saying. And according to this view, it really only focuses on the text of [Matthew 5:32](#) and [Luke 16:18](#), which is the Sermon on the Mount text. And guys, Yeshua is responding to a heated debate when he speaks. This section of scripture is not a dissertation on divorce. It's not. Obviously. Yeshua is doing what he always does—he's pointing out a deeper issue here to the Pharisees. A deeper issue.

The Whole Bible View

And there is another view on how to read these verses. And I guess the slang for it would be "the whole Bible view." And that would be looking at not only what Yeshua is saying in the context of how he's saying it, but also what the Torah says and what God himself said, and also what one of the most famous apostles said about divorce: the apostle Paul, right? If Yeshua said this, then Paul should say the same thing.

This view looks at [Matthew 19:9](#) and [Matthew 5:32](#), where it states that adultery is a valid reason to divorce and to break a marriage. [Exodus 21](#) in the Torah says if one of the parties is in a situation of neglect or abuse, this is grounds for a divorce. Paul in [1 Corinthians 7:15](#) states that if you are married—men and women, if you're married to an unbeliever—stick with it. Their being an unbeliever is not a good enough reason for you to break this covenant of God. But if they desert you and abandon you, if they leave you, let them go free. And the whole chapter is speaking about marriage. And right at the beginning of the chapter, I found something fascinating. Paul specifically cites [Exodus 21](#) in stating a duty of a man is to give his wife conjugal rights, sex, according to her request. He says this is a duty of a husband. It's commanded. That's what Torah says.

Is [Exodus 21](#) Torah? And didn't Yeshua say not one jot or tittle would be removed from the Torah? No. Don't think the Bible teaches that Yeshua did away with the Torah. Some people might, but I don't believe so. I think that to take a statement from Yeshua that was a response

to a particular cultural debate and mold a dogma out of it while ignoring the rest of the Bible would be an abuse of the Bible. And if your heart is looking for a reason to divorce your spouse other than a reason that involves one of you becoming a victim, you have bastardized the sacred covenant of marriage.

And the Bible makes it clear that God allows divorce. God allows remarriage in the Torah. But the Bible also makes it clear that God hates divorce in [Malachi 2:16](#). And that God expects you as someone's spouse to show the same level of love and commitment and mercy and forgiveness that he does towards you. Marriage is kind of a big deal, just a tad.

God Speaks of His Own Marriage

And if you remember, Yeshua had a good reason for this attitude toward the Pharisees—citing adultery and arguing this stance. It was God himself who speaks of a marriage ruined by adultery. He speaks of it as being his own marriage, if you remember in the prophets. It was God himself who speaks of suffering a divorce, being forced into it by his adulterous wife. It is God who states how much he hates to see divorce as a result of broken marriage vows. And it's kind of a big deal. Not simply divorce, but marriage. All of it is kind of a big deal.

And the later prophets play out this motif in describing Israel and Judah. And Hosea, you guys fans of Hosea? In chapter 1, Hosea plays out this drama of Israel and God through the person of Hosea and how he marries this wonderful woman full of integrity named Gomer. And the chapter shows a suffering husband being disappointed in his spouse's refusal to abide in the intimate marriage covenant they once shared. And the chapter ends with this husband, God, refusing to even be their God, much less an intimate partner moving forward. He's fed up. He's in despair.

Israel's Unfaithfulness

And chapter 2 shows that this relationship has ended in a type of divorce: "You are no longer my wife. I am not your husband." And it speaks about how she took wine and grain and clothing and silver and gold—all the provisions that a husband gives his wife, as described in [Exodus 21](#). And how this woman, Israel, took these things from God, her husband, the provisions, and shared them with Baal and her other lovers. Wow. What a slap in the face.

And the chapter is filled with this husband being angry, but it's a suffering anger. It's despair. What am I supposed to do? How much more can I do for you? I want you. I want you back. I want our relationship back, and I'm willing to do whatever it takes despite your failures in it.

Come Back to Me

The chapter goes on to speak about God yearning for his bride to return to him. "I know that you've left the marriage, and I know that you've slept around with all these other guys. Come back to me. I want you back. I don't care. I want you back. I don't care that you committed adultery. I want you back." And he declares that his relationship somehow will be made new with his bride, despite how far she has gone. And it won't be renewed; it will be new. It will be new because he will forgive her. And she will not even remember the names of her past lovers. And she will be totally consumed by his love and devotion during this time.

Jeremiah's Continuation

Jeremiah revisits the same emphasis in [Jeremiah 3](#), building on Isaiah's earlier assertion. You might be familiar with this chapter, or at least verse 8. The verse is quoted a lot without the whole chapter being quoted in context. And he recounts how Israel is given a bill of divorce in verse 8, and how Judah, her sister, is even more wicked because she had warning and she's doing the same stuff.

And I want to read a section of [Jeremiah 8](#) starting in verse 12. And I want you to listen to the emotion of God speaking to his wife here, who he just said was divorced. And if you're kind of a Bible study geek, the very beginning of Jeremiah chapter 3 quotes [Deuteronomy 24](#). As if Jeremiah is pondering: how can a man remarry a woman who has gone off and remarried? He can't take her back, but God says divorce. I'm going to.

A New Covenant and New Marriage

Somehow it's going to be a new marriage. It's not going to be a renewal. It's going to be a new thing I'm going to do. And Jeremiah kind of ponders that at the beginning of the chapter. So God says, "I've given Israel a bill of divorce. Judah is far from me as well, even more wicked." And so verse 12 in [Jeremiah 3](#) says, "Go proclaim this message toward the north. Israel's what? Been given a bill of divorce. God says, return. Come back, faithless Israel, declares the Lord. I will frown on you no longer." They were divorced, right? "I am your husband." So he's speaking about this renewal, this newness of covenant. The phoenix rising from the ashes to be this totally new foundation of their love.

"In those days when your numbers have increased greatly in the land, declares the Lord, people will no longer say the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord. It will not even enter their minds or be remembered. It will not be missed, nor will another one even be made. At that time they will

call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord, and all nations will gather to Jerusalem to honor the name of the Lord. No longer will they follow the stubbornness of their evil heart. In those days, the people of Judah will join the people of Israel, and together they will come from the northern land to the land I give their ancestors as an inheritance. They will accept the inheritance, and they will come back into this marriage covenant with me."

Hosea chapter 2, after he states that I'm no longer your husband, starting in verse 16, he says, "You will call me my husband, and you will no longer call me my master. I will remove the names of the Baals, or gods, from your lips. No longer will their names even be invoked." Wow. So that covenant that he spoke of, it's with all creation, almost like a new covenant. How great is God's mercy in a covenant relationship? How great is God's forgiveness in a covenant relationship? How important is a marriage covenant to God? It's kind of a big, big sacred deal.

And this covenant God promises to make with his people, where he forgives their sins and wipes away their transgression—it's this new covenant. And it is one based on the mercy and forgiveness of God, where the vows will be placed on the hearts.

When Covenant is Truly Broken

And Yeshua responds to the Pharisees, representing how God views marriage and how God views divorce. Divorce is not something you just do. It is not for any cause. Divorce is something that results from unrepentant shattering of a marriage covenant. Your wife or husband may bug you. They may talk loud. That was a legitimate reason to get a divorce in the house of El if your wife talks too loud. Ladies, I know this never happens. Men, your wife may talk loud sometimes. Ladies, your husband might annoy you sometimes. This does not overwrite the vows that you made. It does not. The vows that you made are too big in the sight of God. They are that big.

If vows are taken within a marriage covenant, divorce is allowed. It's not commanded. Why? Because mercy is always preferred from God's standpoint. "Don't you know Moses commanded us?" No, Moses allowed it. Why did he allow divorce? Because you don't have the capacity in certain situations to move forward. And we get that. Moses got that. So he allowed it. God wants to see two reconciled as one. That's the heart of God.

If someone shatters a covenant, they can repent. Come back to me. Repent. And if they repent, the hope—the hope is that the covenant will stand on a new foundation of forgiveness and mercy and intimacy. That's the hope. Divorce is awful. It's tragic. And Yeshua is saying, make

sure, make sure you need to walk down that path before you do. Make sure this is what you want to do. Yeshua is drawing this context in his response to the question.

But if there is a constant shattering of a covenantal union and the promises within the marriage, and there is no repentance, according to Torah, the marriage is broken by definition. By definition. A spouse choosing to leave for means of safety or to avoid emotional or physical abuse, they didn't break the covenant. The partner that shattered the covenant promises did.

And I've heard stories of abuse victims whose abuse was furthered by good-willed believers telling them that they were adulterers for leaving a marriage. Physically abused women saying, "Yeah, but I thought I had to remain married or else I was disappointing God." [Exodus 21](#) says you are now free. Whatever neglect and abuse took place in your marriage should not have been found within your marriage covenant to begin with, according to the law of God.

Mercy Always Wins

And worship team, you guys can come on up. We can conclude. Maybe you're currently in a marriage and you are contemplating divorce. I don't know. I would encourage you to reflect prayerfully on the vows that you took and ask yourself: Is this covenant in my marriage being broken by my spouse? Is our marriage covenant being broken by my spouse? And if the answer is no, then you still have a lot of hope to work together in support of your union with them, no matter how annoying it may be.

And maybe you're not married yet. I want this to be an encouragement and give weight to what marriage looks like. It's something that was designed to be eternal. And mercy always wins, and forgiveness always wins, and love always wins. And that is what Yeshua's message was all about. Yeshua's response to the Pharisees was in reflection to how much effort God put into his marriage with an adulterous bride—you. And Yeshua wanted to make that point: minimizing the sacredness of a covenant and getting a divorce over something that is not actually shattering the marriage covenant reflects a selfish agenda that is rooted in your heart and not of God.

Your spouse is worth fighting for. Your spouse is worth fighting for. And that's the message of Yeshua. And I don't know where you're at today, but I want to tell you that God is fighting for you, and God's arms are open, and God's love has no limits, and God wants to see you return to him. And God will do whatever it takes to make sure you feel his love.

Have you been a covenant breaker in that relationship? Maybe some of you have experienced a divorce in your life, and I'm sorry for that. And I'm sorry that your marriage ended in such a way. Move forward. Let's move forward and encourage one another of what the weight of

marriage stands for. God sees hope. He sees eternity when you make those vows and covenants. He sees something that if both parties are willing to engage in one another, then this will last forever. It will. And if you're in a marriage relationship today that has abuse or neglect and a spouse that refuses to stand by their vows, tell somebody. Tell somebody. Because your safety is our concern. Tell somebody in leadership. We can try to help.

Please stand as we conclude services. I encourage you to take time to reflect, not just on a marriage covenant with your spouse, but the marriage covenant that God has called you to partake in with him. Where are you in that? Are you the spouse that's running away, turning your back toward God, saying, "Your love and provisions are not enough for me?" He's calling you back. He's saying, "Come back to me." A prayer team will be to the sides. We have a prayer team available. And for anyone who may need support or prayer requests, if you're going through anything in your life currently, we're here to lift you up. And we're here to pray with you. So please don't leave here carrying something that you need to leave behind.

Our God's definition of marriage is eternal and sacred. If you're having problems with your spouse, now is the time to pray for them, and now is the time to lift them up. God seeks full restoration in all things. If you'd like to donate to this ministry and be a part of what God is doing through it, you can donate through our online giving portal here. We thank you for your continued support, and we look forward to next time. Shalom.

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