

“The Marriage Marathon” (Matthew 19:1–12)

Do you remember how John the Baptizer died? Matthew 14 records that John had been openly critical of Herod Antipas’ adulterous marriage to his brother Philip’s wife. As a result, he was arrested, bound, and thrown into prison. The only person who hated public criticism more than Herod was his new wife Herodias, and she took advantage of any opportunity to silence her critics. Such an opportunity arose one evening when Herodias’s daughter performed a lewd dance at Herod’s birthday party. He was so impressed with her dancing ability that he promised her anything she desired. Taking the cue from her mother, she asked for John the Baptist’s head on a platter. Herod agreed to the request, and the First Family instantly had one less critic. John the Baptizer, one of the greatest preachers who has ever lived, was beheaded because he addressed the issue of divorce and remarriage.

I recognize that I, too, may be putting my life in jeopardy by preaching this text. I have considered wearing either a suit of armor or a bullet proof vest. Yet, I do need to address the controversial but critical topic of divorce and remarriage. The reason is obvious: Our coworkers, neighbors, classmates, family, and friends are observing the marriages of Christians and rightfully asking: “Is Jesus really the answer?” Although the church talks a big game about marriage, it often doesn’t back it up! Our holiness, faithfulness, and perseverance in our marriages are frequently no better than those who are atheists and agnostics. It leads to the disturbing conclusion that Jesus doesn’t really make a difference in this most important area of our lives. Nevertheless, Jesus holds individual believers responsible and accountable to their marriage vows. He declares that *marriage is covenant plus commitment*.¹ In other words, when you married your spouse you entered into a covenant before God and man. This covenant demands *total* commitment “till death do us part.” Let me say it again: *Marriage is covenant plus commitment*. In Matt 19:1–12² Jesus articulates three critical principles.

1. Divorce is not God’s will (19:1–6). In this first section Jesus responds to a malicious question from the Pharisees and reeducates them on God’s original purpose in marriage. Matthew writes: **“When Jesus had finished these words, He departed from Galilee and came into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan; and large crowds followed Him, and He healed them there. Some Pharisees came to³ Jesus, testing Him and asking, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?’”** (19:1–3). Jesus has just finished speaking a parable on the importance of forgiving others (18:21–35). He then begins to make His way to Jerusalem for the last time. Matthew records that Jesus was in Perea, the region where Herod Antipas reigned. Knowing that Herod and his new wife Herodias were still a little sensitive about their marriage, the Pharisees laid a trap for Jesus. If they could trick Jesus into condemning divorce and remarriage in the same manner as John, who knows? Another party? Another dance? Another head? I can almost hear their excitement.⁴

By asking this question: “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?” (19:3),⁵ the Pharisees were trying to get Jesus to say something to contradict Moses or damage His reputation with the people.⁶ They weren’t seeking the truth; they were just trying to force Jesus into a corner. A hotbed of discussion surrounded the interpretations of Moses’ divorce regulation. The leading Pharisees of Jesus’ day debated the grounds for divorce that Moses established, who allowed a man to divorce his wife if he “finds something indecent about her” (Deut 24:1). The debate focused on the phrase “something indecent” (*erwat dabar*).⁷ The more conservative school of Shammai held to the letter of the Mosaic law and said that the word “indecent” meant adultery. The more liberal school of Hillel interpreted “indecent” to mean that a husband might divorce his wife for any reason at all (e.g., “he may divorce her even if she spoiled a dish for him”).⁸

Instead of debating the scholarly opinions of the day on divorce, Jesus talked to the Pharisees about marriage. He circumvents their whole argument based on Deut 24 by going back to the beginning of creation to demonstrate God's intention for the institution of marriage.⁹ Matthew writes: **“And He [Jesus] answered and said, ‘Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE,’ and said, ‘FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED 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 no man separate’”** (19:4–6). In speaking to the preachers of His day, Jesus said: “Preachers, you should really read your Bible!”¹⁰ He then goes back to the beginning and quotes Gen 1:27: “God made them male and female.” The point being that marriage is to be a monogamous relationship between one man and one woman. Simply put, God does not recognize homosexual marriage. Jesus then quotes Gen 2:24 and emphasizes the importance of leaving and cleaving. The word “leave” (*kataleipo*) is imperatival in force.¹¹ This term is stronger than other synonyms translated “leave.”¹² It implies a deliberate abandonment, sometimes permanent (as in this case). When a man or woman leaves behind his or her parents for a spouse, there is no going back. That season of life is over for good—a new relationship takes precedence over all previous ties.¹³ “Joined together” or “cleave” (*kollao*) means to stick like glue through thick and thin. The man is responsible to cleave to his wife physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. As he does so, the wife will generally respond. One word of warning though: Be especially careful of child idolatry and spouse sacrifice. Many Christian couples worship their children and sacrifice their spouse on the altar of parenting. But, the Bible is clear: The husband and wife relationship takes precedence over the child and parent relationship. Sadly, many couples ignore this principle and become so focused on their kids that there seems to be no reason to stay married once they have raised their children.

It is important to note that elsewhere in the Old Testament “leave” and “cleave” are covenant terms. When Israel forsakes God's covenant she “leaves” Him; when Israel is obedient to God's covenant she “cleaves” to Him.¹⁴ The language of Genesis and Jesus' use of it demonstrates that marriage is a covenant¹⁵ between you and your spouse made before witnesses and God. A covenant is serious! Yet, I have had spouses pursuing divorce tell me that their marriage is none of my business! In some cases I have even officiated their wedding! That's when I immediately respond, “You have it all wrong—your marriage is my business! You made a commitment to your spouse before God, your family members and friends, and me! Don't you dare tell me that it's none of my business!” Let me be clear: Marriage is not a private matter. The idea of a purely private marriage is a recent aberration spawned by the culture of individualism and the demise of community. Christian marriage calls for a public covenant before God, the church, the family, and the state.¹⁶ As individuals and as a church family we must hold believers accountable to their marriage vows. *Marriage is covenant plus commitment.*

Jesus concludes: “What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate” (Matt 19:6b). “Let no man separate” (*me chorizeto*) is an imperative prohibition.¹⁷ This verse doesn't mean “no one can separate,” but rather, it means “it is possible to separate, but you should not.”¹⁸ You must not separate the union created by God because your marriage does not belong to you; it belongs to God. The phrase, “let no man separate” is critical. God no longer sees two individuals; He sees one. When you said, “I do” you entered into a “one flesh” relationship. When you divorce your spouse you reveal that you lied before the living God! When you go downtown to dissolve your marriage, you are giving a man more power than God. Stop and think about it: You are saying God doesn't have the power to keep your marriage, and then you give a mere man the power to destroy it; which by the way, he does not have in the eyes of God. What an insult to the integrity and power of God! *Marriage is covenant plus commitment.*

My children frequently get splinters. I know from my childhood that splinters are no fun. They can hurt like the dickens! But splinters are not typically too serious, so I like to jokingly suggest amputation of the arm or leg. I will inform my child that since I am a doctor I have the authority to make such a decision. I even insist on performing the surgery. This usually elicits laughter. No matter how bad the splinter hurts, anyone knows that a splinter should not result in amputation. Tragically, in many marriages splinters are leading to amputation. For many a spouse, instead of getting rid of the splinter in their marriage, they opt to get rid of their partner. However, when a couple who is “one flesh” divorce, it is the equivalent to the violence of amputation, mutilation, or dismemberment.¹⁹

Perhaps you have never considered how God views marriage. I believe one of the reasons for the divorce epidemic among Christians is that we don't have a biblical understanding of marriage or we forget what is true about marriage. We need to be educated or reeducated on God's view of marriage because 90% of Christians who get divorced don't have a right to. Divorce is often a tragedy of ignorance; Christians don't know what they are doing! So before you consider divorce, please remember: *Marriage is covenant plus commitment.*

[Jesus is clear: Divorce is not God's will. However, Jesus does grant an exception . . .]

2. Divorce is permissible for sexual sin (19:7–9). In this second section, the Pharisees respond to Jesus' strong stance on marriage with a follow-up question. Jesus then explains the only way out of a marriage. **“They said to Him, ‘Why then did Moses²⁰ command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY?’”** The Pharisees return to Deut 24:1–4 and think that they have trapped Jesus, referencing the Mosaic law that allowed a husband to give to his wife a certificate of divorce. Since sinful abuse of a marriage partner was a harsh reality in the ancient world, Moses instituted a regulation designed to do three things: (1) protect the sanctity of marriage from something “indecent” defiling the relationship; (2) protect the woman from a husband who might simply send her away without any cause; and (3) document her status as a legitimately divorced woman, so that she would not be thought a harlot or a runaway adulteress. The Pharisees insist that if Moses allowed divorce, then it must be a valid option for a marriage partner to consider.²¹ But the Pharisees have misinterpreted the Scripture. They said that Moses commanded (*eneteilato*) divorce. Here they were agreeing with rabbinical opinion that divorce was mandatory in certain cases. They were going beyond Scripture, however, for Moses did not command divorce. Rather, says Jesus, he “permitted” (*epetrepsen*) it.²² The Pharisees seemed to have regarded Moses as a patron of the practice of divorce. Jesus corrected them by pointing out that Moses was only seeking to mitigate its evil results.²³

Jesus counters the Pharisees objection by once again going back to God's original intention with marriage. Matthew writes in 19:8–9: **“He [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. And²⁴ I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except²⁵ for immorality, and marries another woman commits²⁶ adultery.’”²⁷** Jesus turned the Pharisees own question into an indictment against them. Placing the first-century Pharisees in the same category with rebellious Israel of Moses' day, Jesus said that Moses permitted divorce because “*your*” hearts were hard. Moses knew that hardhearted people would continue to divorce their spouses, so he passed on God's guidelines to protect those who were victims of divorce. Yet, Jesus says that this was never God's original design. Divorce always evidences the presence of sin, the hardness of heart.²⁸ “Hardness” is simply a refusal to submit to God's Word. When you hear statements such as: “I am divorcing my spouse because I deserve to be happy” or even worse, “I'm ending this marriage because God wants me to be happy!” you know that “hardness” has set in.

Bear in mind, though, that irreconcilable differences are not grounds for divorce; they are grounds for marriage. Additionally, God doesn't recognize irreconcilable differences. You may have been divorced downtown, but not in heaven. The reason is clear in 19:9: Jesus states that divorce "except²⁹ for immorality [*porneia*]" is "adultery." Since "adultery" is already specified by another Greek word (*moichao*, 19:9) *porneia* must be something less specific than adultery.³⁰ The semantic range of *porneia* includes sexual sins such as: incest, homosexuality, bestiality, prostitution, and molestation (see Lev 18:6–18).³¹ Essentially, it refers to any sexual intercourse that God forbids (i.e., with any creature other than one's spouse). I don't believe that Jesus is referring to a "one night stand"—as awful as that is. I believe He is addressing ongoing, unrepentant *porneia*.³² This is evidence that the offending spouse has willfully and repeatedly abandoned the marriage vow of exclusive devotion to his or her spouse. In this case, the offended spouse may be justified in divorcing the other.

There is a rising tide of Christian opinion that argues that pornography is grounds for divorce. Personally, I am not comfortable with this conclusion. Although it is possible that the Greek term *porneia* could include the concept of pornography, it is unlikely. *Porneia* means *physical* sexual immorality. The reason why Jesus permitted this as grounds for divorce is because it violates the "one flesh" principle (19:5–6), which is foundational to marriage. Furthermore, if the church opens up the possibility of divorce for the sin of pornography Christian marriages will unravel like a cheap sweater. With that said when a spouse is involved in pornography he or she will typically eventually act out. In the case of ongoing adultery, there is the freedom to divorce.

The apostle Paul mentions another exception that permits divorce: desertion by an unbelieving spouse (cf. 1 Cor 7:12–16). Together, Jesus' and Paul's teachings address the two main components of the marriage covenant—interpersonal intimacy culminating in sexual relations and personal allegiance or loyalty. Both infidelity and desertion break one half of the marriage covenant. Unfaithfulness destroys sexual exclusivity; desertion reneges on the commitment to leave and cleave.³³

While most people agree that divorce is permissible under certain circumstances, some question the implied right to remarry. But in this passage Jesus is clearly addressing the issue of one who divorces and "marries another." He says it is wrong to do so except in the case of unfaithfulness. Therefore, in the case of immorality, remarriage is permissible after divorce.³⁴ However, it is important to note that in the Old Testament adultery was punishable by death (Deut 22:22).³⁵ That means the innocent mate in an adulterous marriage often became a widow. And, it is clearly understood in the Bible that a widow is free to remarry (Rom 7:2; 1 Cor 7:39). The fact that we live in a more lenient culture in which adulterers are not executed does not negate the innocent party's rights to remarry, though he or she is certainly under no obligation to do so.

The following applications may help to flesh out this passage further:

Refuse to divorce. When I perform premarital counseling, I begin the first session by talking about what I call the "d-word"—one of the greatest expletives known to man. I tell the couple that the word "divorce" can never be mentioned under any circumstances. I urge them to rip it out of their personal dictionary. Uttering the threat of divorce leads to instability and insecurity on the part of your spouse. You must learn to control your tongue!³⁶ Instead, you should continually tell your spouse: "Nothing you can do will ever cause me to leave you. I am here for the long haul. I will love you with the unconditional love of my Savior." In the same vein, the Christian community must emphasize that divorce is not an option. We need to recommit ourselves as a church to the institution of marriage. We must not tell people what they want to hear. We must stand up and fight for their marriage.³⁷ *Marriage is covenant plus commitment.*

I believe it is also worth noting that adultery does not necessitate divorce.³⁸ Jesus made it clear in this text that the allowance for divorce, even if justified, is only an allowance, never a mandate. He did not encourage or recommend divorce for unfaithfulness.³⁹ Reconciliation is God's intention. Hence, I will never encourage divorce, even in the case of adultery.⁴⁰ I have dealt with approximately eight cases of ongoing adultery and seven of the eight marriages have survived. Those marriages are actually doing better today than they were prior to the adultery. Why is this? Most likely because God has honored the radical faith and obedience of the couple who has determined to stay married. Remember, marriage does not dissolve because one partner breaks the covenant with his or her spouse. I think it is by design that the context of Matt 19:1–12 deals with forgiveness (18:21–35), children (19:13–15), and wealth and reward (19:16–20:16). Before you divorce your spouse, reflect on Jesus' words of forgiveness, ponder the impact that your divorce will have on your children, and in some cases your financial well-being. Lastly, meditate on the possible eternal reward that will be yours for persevering in your marriage. The truth is: Divorce (and even remarriage) does not solve problems; it only creates new ones. In the vast majority of cases, divorce just isn't worth it. A divorce attorney once said: "There are two processes that should never be entered into prematurely: embalming and divorce." Why? Because both processes involve death.⁴¹ Think carefully before you dissolve your marriage.

Avoid immorality. It is clear that sexual immorality can cost you your marriage. Heb 13:4 says: "Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge." In 1 Thess 4:6 Paul calls God "the avenger" (i.e., punisher) of those who commit sexual sin. These words are very scary and they ought to motivate us to stay out of sexual sin. Don't let the fleeting pleasure of a moment destroy your marriage, your family, and your Christian legacy. *Marriage is covenant plus commitment.*

Extend forgiveness to those who have been divorced. Divorce does not make believers "second class Christians."⁴² We need to offer love and grace to those who have been wounded and devastated by divorce. Many individuals in our churches have not wanted a divorce. They were served papers that they didn't want to sign. They were eventually left with little or no choice but to agree to end the marriage. In many respects, these individuals are victims that don't need to be judged or condemned. In cases where one spouse willfully and recklessly dissolved the marriage, often there has been repentance. While certain consequences will linger for the rest of their lives, their sins are forgiven and they are experiencing fellowship with God. We must embrace such individuals with love and acceptance.

[Jesus believes in the permanence of marriage; however, He does grant that some marriages may end as a result of sexual sin. Now He takes a moment to speak to the unmarried and says . . .]

3. Singleness is a godly option (19:10–12).⁴³ In this third exchange, the disciples react to Jesus' stringent position on divorce.⁴⁴ **"The disciples said to Him, 'If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry'"** (19:10). The disciples' response is *very* telling. They had come to look at tying-the-knot as tying a slip-knot! So they respond by essentially saying: "You've got to be kidding! If a person is in a miserable marriage and there is no adultery, then that spouse is stuck! The spouse has to be married for the rest of his or her life?" Jesus' stance on divorce and remarriage was far stricter than the disciples (or anyone else) expected. They had lived all their lives in a society where divorces were granted liberally. The prevalence of arranged marriages and the tendency for women to be viewed as property may have contributed to the number of divorces.⁴⁵ To learn that there was no easy way out of an unsatisfactory marriage caused the disciples to propose that it might be better to avoid the risk of getting into a bad marriage by staying single. The disciples' conclusion, given Jesus' high standards, was: "It is better not to marry!" Jesus had made His point inextricably clear!

Now after hearing the disciples' reaction, Jesus could have said, "No, men, I'm not really that stringent. You have misunderstood my intent." Instead, Matthew records: **"But He said to them, 'Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.'**⁴⁶ He who is able to accept *this*, let him accept it."⁴⁷ (19:11–12). Jesus said, "That's exactly right. You understand what I've been trying to say. Those who hear My words better think about what I have said. Don't be in a rush to get married. Count the cost!" The word "accept" (*choreo*) means "to grasp in the mental sense, to accept, to comprehend, to understand."⁴⁷ In the immediate context, of course, Jesus means more than mere intellectual acceptance of His teaching. He means also a moral sensitivity to it and a willingness to obey.

The phrase "has been given" (*dedotai*) is most likely a divine passive.⁴⁸ For some, it is God's will to remain single, but this calling is only for them to accept it (19:11).⁴⁹ Jesus does not contradict His earlier confirmation that the right order of God's creation is for men and women to marry and to remain married permanently (19:4–6), but neither is He going to adopt the disciple's cynical attitude toward a life of singleness. Singleness is an appropriate alternative for those for whom God has called. However, if you are single and considering marriage *please* be careful when selecting a mate. Before you say I do, understand what you are doing." It is better to be single and miserable than married and miserable. Remember to count the cost: *Marriage is covenant plus commitment.*

This week, Pat Robertson gave his blessing to divorce your spouse if he or she is afflicted with Alzheimer's disease.⁵⁰ Robertson views Alzheimer's as a form of death. But he is dead wrong on this point. One of the greatest expressions of unconditional Christ-like love is sticking with your spouse through Alzheimer's. When I have performed premarital counseling, I always refer to another Robertson: Dr. Robertson McQuilkin, the former president of Columbia Bible College and Seminary in South Carolina. In 1990, he decided to step down from his prestigious post in order to take care of his wife Julie. Julie had Alzheimer's disease and required constant care twenty-four hours a day. Since McQuilkin was an international leader, author, and conference speaker, many well-meaning Christians urged him to put Julie into an Alzheimer's unit or rest home so that he could continue to advance God's kingdom through his powerful ministry. But Robertson McQuilkin honored his marriage vows "for better for worse, in sickness and in health, till death do us part." As a result, his impact is legendary! You see, the world is looking for a husband, a father, and a grandfather who is a man of integrity. There are plenty of men who can preach, teach, write books, and lead Christendom, but very few can have the impact that Dr. Robertson McQuilkin has had. He is a true contemporary hero. Furthermore, his legacy will reverberate in this life and in the life to come.

Will you honor God in your marriage vows like Robertson McQuilkin? Will you persevere to the end? Will you be a hero to the world, to the church, to your family? I urge you to make up your mind today. *Marriage is covenant plus commitment.*

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Scripture References

Matthew 19:1–12

Genesis 2:18–24

Deuteronomy 24:1–4

Leviticus 18:15–19

Mark 10:2–12

Matthew 5:31–32

1 Corinthians 7:1–16

Study Questions

1. What is my position on divorce and remarriage? Is my view supported by Scripture? Have I carefully studied the pertinent texts (e.g., Matt 5:31–32; 19:3–9; 1 Cor 7:12–16)? Have I interacted thoughtfully and graciously with those who come to different conclusions? Have I changed my thinking at all as a result of this sermon?
2. Who modeled marriage for me? For my wife? How have these models helped shape our relationship? Have positive or negative marriage models impacted me more? Is my marriage serving as a godly model for my children, grandchildren, and church family? Why or why not? Am I accountable to at least one other couple for my marriage health and growth?
3. What is the biggest hindrance in my marriage right now? What do my spouse and I fight about most often? What could I do to attempt to resolve the issue? Will I seek out a mature couple who can help my spouse and me work through this problem area? What am I willing to do to ensure that this area of my marriage is not a proverbial “black eye” to God’s reputation?
4. Dorothy Dix (1870–1951) stated: “So many persons who think divorce a panacea for every ill find out when they try it that the remedy is worse than the disease.” What have I learned from those whom I have watched divorce and remarry? What consequences have these individuals experienced? How have their children fared? How do these consequences motivate me to persevere in my marriage?
5. Robert Browning (1812–1889) said: “Success in marriage is more than finding the right person: it is being the right person.” Am I striving to be the husband or wife that God has called me to be? What change(s) have I made this year? As a single person, how am I seeking to be the right person for my future spouse and for God’s glory? Am I seeking to be cautious in the future selection of a spouse?

Notes

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), 42.

² Carson writes, “Thus the setting of the divorce question in this pericope is different from 5:31-32. There divorce is set in a discourse that gives the norms of the kingdom and the sanctity of marriage; here it is set in a theological disputation that raises the question of what divorces are allowed.” D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), Electronic ed. For further differences in chart form see, David L. Turner, *Matthew*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 460.

³ The verb *proserchomai* (“come to”) indicates something of a formal approach. See Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 479.

⁴ Robert Jeffress, *Say Goodbye to Regret* (Sisters: Multnomah, 1998), 31.

⁵ The expression “for any reason at all” (*kata pasan aitan*) is unique to Matthew.

⁶ Carson, “Matthew.”

⁷ This precise Hebrew expression *erwat dabar* is found elsewhere in the OT only in Deut 23:14, with reference to human excrement. Carson, “Matthew,” addresses the phrase head-on: “But what was the ‘indecency’ in Moses’ day that allowed for divorce? ‘Something indecent’ could not be equated with adultery, for the normal punishment for that was death, not divorce (Deut 22:22)—though it is not at all clear that the death penalty was in fact regularly imposed for adultery (cf. Henry McKeating, “Sanctions Against Adultery in Ancient Israelite Society,” JSOT 11 [1979]: 57-72). Nor could the indecency be suspicion of adultery, for which the prescribed procedure was the bitter-water rite (Num 5:5-31). Yet the indecency must have been shocking: ancient Israel took marriage seriously. The best assumption is that the indecency was any lewd, immoral behavior, sometimes including, but not restricted to, adultery—e.g. lesbianism or sexual misconduct that fell short of intercourse.”

⁸ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*. NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 643.

⁹ By appealing to the creation account, our Lord is using an accepted form of argument in Jewish exegesis, viz., “the more original, the weightier.” See Carson, “Matthew”; Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 481.

¹⁰ Jesus also challenged the Pharisees’ understanding of God’s Word in Matt 12:3, 5.

¹¹ See Blomberg who takes Jesus’ words to be imperatival. Craig L. Blomberg, “Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Celibacy: An Exegesis of Matthew 19:3-12.” *Trinity Journal* 11NS (1990): 166–67. Carson, “Matthew,” 412 seems to take the future tenses as statements of fact.

¹² BDAG s.v. *kataleipo* 1: “to cause to be left in a place, *leave (behind)*.”

¹³ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 481.

¹⁴ E.g., Deut 10:20: “You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall serve Him and cling [“cleave”] to Him, and you shall swear by His name.” Josh 22:5: “Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God and walk in all His ways and keep His commandments and hold fast [“cleave”] to Him and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul.”

¹⁵ See also Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 71.

¹⁶ Hughes, *Genesis*, Electronic ed.

¹⁷ France writes: “. . . the argument here is expressed not in terms of what cannot happen, but of what *must* not happen: the verb is an imperative, ‘let not man separate.’ To break up a marriage is to usurp the function of God by whose creative order it was set up, and who has decreed that it shall be a permanent ‘one flesh’ union.” R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 718.

¹⁸ David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 1–19. See also Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Church: Biblical Solutions for Pastoral Realities* (London: Paternoster, 2003), 7.

¹⁹ John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 773.

²⁰ Here, Jesus confirms the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy.

²¹ Wilkins, *Matthew*, 643.

²² Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 482; Carson, “Matthew,” 413.

²³ Bruner writes: “Genesis . . . gives us God’s pristine will on marriage; Deuteronomy gives us God’s permissive will for failed marriage.” Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary—Volume 2: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (Dallas: Word, 1990), 678.

²⁴ The Greek conjunction *de* (“and, but”) is adversative (Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 483). Jesus is setting His own verdict over against the Mosaic legislation.

²⁵ Carson, “Matthew,” suggests that Mark and Luke probably could assume such an exception without explicitly stating it.

²⁶ A wrong divorce is an adulterous act but is not necessarily continual adultery. Rather, the first act of sexual intercourse with the new partner violates and breaks the previous union. The present tense of the verb “commits adultery” (*moichatai*) probably does not indicate continuous action (“continues to commit adultery”). Instead, the verb must be taken as a gnomic or timeless present describing a general truth. See Carroll D. Osburn, “The Present Indicative in Matthew 19:9,” *Restoration Quarterly* 24 (1981): 193–94, 202–3.

²⁷ Murray calls Matt 19:9 “the most pivotal passage in the New Testament” on the subject of divorce. John Murray, *Divorce* (Philipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1961), 33.

²⁸ Carson, “Matthew.”

²⁹ Carson, “Matthew,” suggests that Mark and Luke probably could assume such an exception without explicitly stating it.

³⁰ Wilkins, *Matthew*, 644.

³¹ Blomberg, “Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Celibacy,” 177. Instone-Brewster 278–79; See also David Janzen, “The Meaning of *Porneia* in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9: An Approach from the Study of Ancient Near East Culture,” *Journal of the Study of the New Testament* 80 (2000): 66–80.

³² I recognize that many spouses “repent” on a regular basis after committing sexual sin. Hence, their repentance must be thoroughly tested to determine if it is genuine.

³³ Blomberg, “Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Celibacy,” 192; Wilkins, *Matthew*, 657.

³⁴ Heth writes: “Simple separation without the possibility of remarriage was unheard-of in both Jewish and Roman marriage law. Though this became the traditional Catholic view of Jesus’ teaching and is a view also held by a minority of evangelicals, there were, in fact, no religious sects in the first century that prohibited remarriage after divorce. This is what the Jewish bill of divorce made abundantly clear: ‘Behold, you are free to marry any man.’” See William A. Heth, “Remarriage for Adultery or Desertion,” in *Remarriage After Divorce in Today’s Church: 3 Views*. Eds. Paul E. Engle and Mark L. Strauss (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 67.

³⁵ It is unlikely that the death penalty for divorce was ever frequently enforced. By NT times, however, the death penalty for adultery was no longer being inflicted.

³⁶ Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790) said: “A flip of the foot you may soon recover. But a slip of the tongue you may never get over.”

³⁷ Here are some of the natural consequences of divorce: (1) Divorce dramatically increases the likelihood of early death from stroke, hypertension, respiratory cancer, and intestinal cancer. Astonishingly, being divorced and a non-smoker is only slightly less dangerous than smoking a pack or more a day and staying married! (2) Divorce also disrupts mental health, especially for men. The suicide rate for white males goes up by a factor of four with divorce, and they have ten times the probability of needing psychiatric care. (3) Divorce takes a devastating toll on children. Proportionately twice as many criminals come from single-parent homes. Indeed, family structure proves more effective than economic status in predicting a life in crime. Children from broken homes are more likely to do poorly in school, abuse drugs, and attempt suicide. Analysis of research studies by David Larson, summarized in Philip Yancey, *Finding God in Unexpected Places* (New York: Ballantine, 1995), 82–83, quoted in Jeffress, *Grace Gone Wild!* 140.

³⁸ Both Jewish and Roman law mandated divorce for adultery. Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 467.

³⁹ John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, 4th edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 373.

⁴⁰ Blomberg, “Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Celibacy,” 171: “Jesus is looking on to the era of the new covenant when Moses’ concession to hardheartedness will no longer be in effect. Instead God’s people will follow a greater standard of righteousness than the law required (Matt 5:20). Grace will provide a greater empowerment to perform His more demanding will (Matt 11:28–30; cf. John 14:16–17.” Turner, *Matthew*, 463 writes: “If God hated divorce under the old covenant (Mal. 2:14–16), how much more so now that the kingdom has been inaugurated.”

⁴¹ Quoted in Jeffress, *Grace Gone Wild!* 141.

⁴² See Michael A. Braun, *Second-Class Christians: A New Approach to the Dilemma of Divorce People in the Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1989).

⁴³ There is no parallel to these verses in any of the other Gospels.

⁴⁴ For these three scene shifts/exchanges, see Charles Talbert, *Matthew*. Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 233.

⁴⁵ Parents arranged marriages, and in Galilee at least prospective spouses could not spend time alone until after the wedding. Then, more so than today, marriage partners could not know in advance how their spouse would turn out. To marry without the possibility of divorce in a painful marriage seemed worse than not marrying at all! See Craig S. Keener, *Matthew*. The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), Electronic ed.

⁴⁶ Wilkins, *Matthew*, 645–46: “Some eunuchs have been born without the capacity for sexual relations, such as those born without properly developed genitalia. Others have been castrated for official functions, especially those in some cultures, like the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27), who were castrated in order to be officials in a court among royal women. Still others have adopted abstinence because God has made an exception for their particular work in the kingdom of heaven, such as John the Baptist and Jesus himself. Paul points out that some, on the basis of extreme situations in the church, would serve better if they were single (1 Cor. 7:7–9). But nowhere in Scripture is celibacy seen as a higher form of spirituality than being married.”

⁴⁷ BDAG s.v. *choreo* 3 b b.

⁴⁸ Blomberg, “Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Celibacy,” 183; Turner, *Matthew*, 463 n. 11. Cf. Daniel B. Wallace 436–37.

⁴⁹ Green eloquently states: “But Jesus is not legislating. He is setting forth God’s purpose in marriage. He is going behind the casuistry on divorce that was so beguiling then as now. He is telling them what God wants in marriage, and what befits the kingdom. If that seems tough, it is because marriage is a gift. It is something by which God joins people together. It is not his gift to everyone. Who can demand gifts? They are not rights. Some people are precluded from marriage because of some congenital inability to consummate. Some have been emasculated and turned into court eunuchs. So marriage is an impossibility for them too. But Jesus is interested in the third class he mentions, those who for the sake of pleasing the King have been willing to offer to him this prized area of their sexuality, and have been willing to stay single as their Master did. Not everyone can do that. Most are not able to sustain that pressure on so basic an instinct as to marry. ‘*The one who can accept this should accept it*’ (12). There is such a thing as a call to celibacy. And it is a very beautiful thing when it is embraced and gladly followed through.” Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven* (Leicester; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988), 203.

⁵⁰ Mike Jaccarino, “Pat Robertson gives blessing to divorce, as long as one spouse is afflicted with Alzheimer’s Disease”: *NY Times Daily News* 9/15/2011: Read more:

www.nydailynews.com/news/national/2011/09/15/2011-09-15_pat_robertson_gives_blessing_to_divorce_if_one_spouse_is_afflicted_with_alzheim.html#ixzz1Y2sIF8pe. Accessed 15 September 2011.