

Matthew: On Earth As It Is In Heaven

Remarriage * Matthew 19:3-10

Please take your Bibles and turn with me one more time to Matthew 19. As you are turning I'd like to quickly highlight that the message next week will be what you might call a sequel to the Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage series that we are concluding today. The message will return us to the Sermon on the Mount where we will study what Jesus has to say about lust, one of the leading contributors to the topic we talked about last week, divorce. And due to the nature of this topic, we want to give parents a heads up and let you know that we will provide ministry for children up through 5th grade during the service. Just a note on this parents: we leave this up to your discretion, but we would encourage you to strongly consider having your 4th and 5th graders attend the service, as unfortunately this is an issue that is very relevant with children that young these days.

So, that's next week. Today we are going bring our series to a close by discussing remarriage. Let me also say as we begin that I really appreciate how you have responded to this series. It is a tremendous privilege to pastor at a church where people prioritize God's Word over what they want to hear and willingly submit themselves to what He wants rather than tradition, experience, circumstances, or ease. By the way, the result of this is the privilege of seeing the Holy Spirit work in powerful ways as He redeems lost people, heals marriages, and builds His church here in SE Iowa, which is exactly what has been happening in recent days. Its very exciting stuff. That said, let's go the Lord in prayer and ask Him to continue His work here today.

Review

Ok, so let's get going with a quick review of what we have learned in the series so far. We can essentially summarize the Bible's teaching on marriage and divorce in this way: God created marriage to be one man and one woman for a lifetime. Therefore, every divorce is a result of sin. However, this does not mean that every divorce is sinful. In fact, there are two

instances in which divorce is not sin: sexual immorality and desertion by an unbeliever.

Remarriage is permitted for those who are free from their marriage vows.

Now, this naturally leads to one last issue, and that of course is remarriage. What does the Bible have to say about this issue? Is remarriage ever acceptable, and if so, in what instances? Well, to summarize, the Bible teaches that remarriage is permitted for those who are free from their marriage vows. You need to get this because it is the overarching principle in all remarriage cases. Remarriage is permissible when those who are entering the marriage are free from their previous marriage vows. And the Bible teaches that that there are three instances in which this is the case.

1. Widows and widowers are free to remarry.

Number one, widows and widowers are free to remarry. This of course, is the easy one. Note what Paul says in Romans 7:

For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress. (Romans 7:2-3, ESV)

So, a man or a woman is bound to their marriage vows as long as their spouse is living. However, if their spouse dies they are released from their marriage vows and are free to remarry.

Like I said, this is the easy one. No one debates this. But we do need to mention one important caveat. In 1 Corinthians 7:39, Paul adds this:

A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 7:39, ESV)

Only in the Lord means that remarriage is only permitted to a believer. Just to be clear, this is true in any marriage. Believers are only ever free to marry other believers. While we are here, let me emphasize once again to single believers that since you aren't free to marry an unbeliever, you shouldn't date an unbeliever. While missionary dating sounds noble and all, when you date an unbeliever you will likely marry an unbeliever. Here is what I see happen all the time. A young woman starts dating an unbeliever, with the excuse that it is just dating and she doesn't have any plans on getting married, all the while hoping that her boyfriend will get saved. But this doesn't normally occur and before long she has fallen in love and it is too late. She will almost always go ahead with the wedding, even if she knows it is wrong. And you also know what happens in these situations? The guy, even if he makes a profession of faith, rarely follows the Lord, which ends up causing lots of problems for many years to come. Now, there are exceptions, but that is exactly what they are. Exceptions. They are definitely not the rule. So, don't marry unbelievers. And don't date unbelievers. Consider this my anti-Nike slogan campaign. Just don't do it.

2. Biblically divorced individuals are free to remarry.

Ok, back to the point at hand. Widows and widowers are free to remarry, and number two - biblically divorced individuals are free to remarry. Now, let me be clear what I mean by biblically divorced. A biblically divorced individual is one who is divorced either because their spouse committed sexual immorality or is an unbeliever who deserted them. In other words, their divorce was not a direct result of their sin. And I want to show you this from Scripture, so take a look with me at Matthew 19:9:

And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery. (Matthew 19:9, ESV)

You have to look at this closely, but the *except for sexual immorality* clause applies both to *whoever divorces his wife* and to *and marries another*. It works both forwards and backwards. So, you could actually read the verse this way.

Whoever marries another, except for sexual immorality, commits adultery.

So, if you divorce your spouse because they have committed adultery, you are free to get remarried to another believer. It is not a sin, and you are not committing adultery.

For more on this, let's take a look at the passage we studied in depth last week, 1 Corinthians 7. Verses 13 and 15 say this:

If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. (1 Corinthians 7:13-15, ESV)

I told you last week the phrase *is not enslaved* was going to be important in this week's message. Paul is saying that if an unbeliever deserts a believer, the believer is no longer under obligation to their marriage vows. This means they are free not only to divorce, but also to get remarried.

Now, if you agreed with last's weeks message, this is pretty easy to accept as well. It makes sense that if someone is free to divorce they are also free to remarry. However, now we come to the sticky part. What about those who divorce un-biblically? Are they free to remarry? To put it more clearly, can those who sinfully divorced get remarried?

3. Un-biblically (sinfully) divorced individuals are free to remarry if their former spouse dies or remarries.

Well, the answer is yes, in two circumstances. Un-biblically (sinfully) divorced individuals are free to remarry if their former spouse dies or

remarries. Listen carefully as I attempt to explain this. I will do so by first explaining that un-biblically divorced individuals are not free to remarry if their former spouse is still living and has not remarried. The reason for this is although the marriage has ended, the offending spouse is still obligated before God to their vows and therefore to remarry would be to commit adultery. I will point you one more time to Matthew 19:9:

And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery. (Matthew 19:9, ESV)

Let me be clear on what this means: if you sinfully divorce your spouse, you must stay unmarried until they either die or are remarried. And you might say, well that could be an awful long time! And you know what, you are right. Therefore you should do everything you can to not get divorced in the first place and if you do you should do everything you can to reconcile with your spouse. That's God's Plan A and Plan B. Plan C is to stay unmarried and there is no Plan D. So, do you get that? God's Plan A is for one man and one woman to be married for a lifetime. Plan B is that in the event of a divorce, reconciliation occurs and the couple is remarried. Plan C is that if the divorce was an unbiblical one, the offending party is to stay unmarried until the non-offending party remarries or dies. And there is no Plan D.

Now, let's talk about when sinfully divorced individuals are free to remarry in a little more detail. It's probably most helpful to think of this in terms of reconciliation. By reconciliation I essentially mean remarriage. Where reconciliation of the marriage is not possible, the sinfully divorced person is free to remarry. So, if the spouse dies, reconciliation is impossible, and so remarriage is permissible. And if the spouse remarries, once again reconciliation becomes impossible, and so remarriage is permissible.

Because I know it's quite possible that I may have lost you by now, I have put together a chart that will hopefully make things a little clearer.

Who is Free to Remarry?	
Widows & Widowers	Yes, to a believer
Biblically Divorced Individuals	Yes, to a believer
Un-biblically (sinfully) Divorced Individuals	Yes, to a believer if: 1) Former spouse remarries, or 2) Former spouse dies

Now, let's talk about one other case in which remarriage is permissible. And it is not only permissible, but also desired. That is the case of divorced couples remarrying one another, which I hinted at earlier. If you are here today and you are divorced, God's desire is for you to be reconciled to your former spouse if at all possible. And I recognize that this might be nearly unthinkable for you to even consider, but you need to realize that this issue is at the very heart of God. I can say that, because this is the story of God and His people. Many people don't realize this, but God Himself is a divorcee. Does that statement shock you a little bit? I doubt that most of you realized this when you came in today. And before you get all upset and start calling me a heretic, take a look at what Jeremiah 3:8 tells us:

I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries. (Jeremiah 3:8, NIV)

Because of Israel's repeated adultery in the Old Testament, God came to the point where He finally divorced them. Although God repeatedly forgave and took His people back time after time, there eventually came a point where He said enough and sent them into exile, effectively divorcing them. However, that is not the end of the story. As He was divorcing Israel, God promised that He would one day be reconciled to her.

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the

house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jeremiah 31:31-34, ESV)

Now, the big question is, when and how would this happen? Well, we saw the answer in Ephesians 5 two weeks ago:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. (Ephesians 5:25-27, ESV)

God reconciles with His people through the cross. Just let those words in verse 25 sink in for a moment. Christ loved the church so much that He died in order that our broken relationship with Him could be restored and we could be His for all eternity. Isn't that a wonderful truth?

That's why a divorced couple that gets remarried is one of the greatest gospel pictures that can ever be given. Let me say this; I believe one of the most powerful evidences of the Holy Spirit's working in a church is when struggling marriages are healed and broken marriages are restored. And you need to realize that, wonderfully, this is happening here at Harmony Bible Church even now. In fact, I want to tell you briefly about one such story. Two weeks ago in response to this series a woman in the church emailed me about her and her husband's marriage, divorce, and remarriage. This week I asked her if I could read her email and she granted permission. Here is a summary of their story:

I'll be honest, I'm not exactly sure why, but as I read the email about this coming week's sermon and the series we're in, God seemed to point me in this direction. My first response when I read Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage

was 'Oh, it's our storyline.' We were married in 2001, divorced in 2008, and remarried 2010. I can tell you, for both my husband and I, we know there is a purpose for the journey we have been on and we both praise God for the healing only He could bring and how He raised our second marriage from the ashes of the first. As a result, we experience our blessing of our son everyday. Forgiveness. It all comes down to forgiveness, doesn't it? Marriage is about forgiveness, divorce should be about forgiveness, and remarriage should only happen after forgiveness. And we forgive because we are already forgiven. How could we ever justify not forgiving another when we have been forgiven ourselves?

I just love that last line. *How could we ever justify not forgiving another when we have been forgiven ourselves?* This couple gets it. Because they understand how God has forgiven them, they have been compelled to forgive one another and be reconciled.

And if you have been divorced or are headed that way, this can be you. Your marriage can be saved and become what you always hoped it would be. Let's pray and hope that God does this for many people at Harmony Bible Church and in our community in the days ahead.

So, that brings the teaching portion of our series on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage to a close. However, I realize that this may still leave you with a number of questions. And so to try and answer some of these questions and bring a little more clarity to these issues, I want to take a few minutes to briefly address some of the most common ones. Once again, if you would like to discuss these matters in more detail, I encourage you to connect with one of our Elders. But for now, here are answers to seven common questions about marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

Common Questions Regarding Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

1. What should I do if I married an unbeliever?

Question number one, what should I do if I married an unbeliever? First,

repent and ask for God's forgiveness for disobeying His command to not marry an unbeliever. Second, if your spouse desires to stay married, stay married and be the best husband or wife you can be, praying that God will bring your spouse to Him. However, remember if your spouse desires to leave the marriage, you are free to divorce and get remarried to a believer.

2. What should I do if I have sinfully divorced in the past?

Question number two, what should I do if I have sinfully divorced in the past? First, repent to God and to everyone who was harmed by your sin, starting with your spouse and children. Second, pursue reconciliation with your spouse if at all possible. However, if your former spouse has remarried, and you cannot reconcile you are free to remarry another believer. On the other hand, if your former spouse is still living and has not remarried, you must stay unmarried until you are either reconciled to them, they are remarried, or they pass away.

3. What should I do if I sinfully divorced and remarried?

Question number three, what should I do if I sinfully divorced and remarried? First, repent to God and to your former spouse for the divorce. Second, stay married to your current spouse and be the best husband or wife you can possibly be, trusting in God's forgiveness and goodness to bless you in your current marriage. To make it clear, God does not want you to divorce your current spouse to be reconciled to your former spouse. Two wrongs don't make a right.

4. What should I do if I married someone who sinfully divorced?

Question number four, what should I do if I married someone who sinfully divorced? First, recognize this means you have committed adultery and you need to seek God's forgiveness. Second, stay married to your spouse and be the best husband or wife you can possibly be, trusting in God's forgiveness and goodness to bless your marriage.

5. What should I do if my spouse is a professed believer but I believe they have abandoned our marriage vows?

Question number five, what if my spouse is a professed believer but I feel they have abandoned our marriage vows? First, pray that God would restore your marriage and give you a heart of forgiveness towards your spouse. Second, seek counsel from Harmony's Elders as to how to proceed. I really can't stress this enough. Don't try to handle this on your own. Seek the means God has given to help discern His will in this most serious of matters. Allow us to help you walk through these issues.

6. How should the church respond to biblically divorced individuals?

Question number six, how should the church respond to biblically divorced individuals? As a final reminder, biblically divorced individuals are those who are divorced because their spouse either committed adultery or deserted them. Therefore, their divorce is not a sin, and they should be treated as any other person in the church, with an extra measure of love and compassion for what they have experienced. And in particular in cases of a divorced woman with children, the church has an extra responsibility to come alongside and fill in the gaps.

7. How should the church respond to un-biblically (sinfully) divorced and/or remarried individuals?

Question number 7, how should the church respond to un-biblically (sinfully) divorced and/or remarried individuals? Well, it depends. If the individual is unrepentant, the church should practice Matthew 18:15-20 and seek to bring the individual to repentance and reconciliation with their spouse if at all possible. However, if the person refuses to repent, they should be treated as an unbeliever, which would include removal from church membership.

On the other hand, if the individual is repentant, they should be treated as truly repentant. As I said last week, the church should not have a better memory than God. When God forgives and forgets, so should we. And to put

an exclamation point on this matter, and really on the series as a whole, I want to quote from Jay Adam's book *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible*. Listen to this closely:

We must say, therefore, that what God has cleansed no man must call unclean. Christ is bigger than our sin—even our sin of adultery and divorce. We minimize Christ when we speak and act as if this were not so. These sins are truly heinous; we must not minimize that fact either. But Christ is greater than sin—all sin. We don't minimize sin or its effects, then; rather, we always maximize Christ and the power of his cross.¹

And I want to conclude by reminding you of the very best example of this in scripture, David and Bathsheba. Do you remember that story? It is about as sordid as you can get. David committed lust, adultery, murder, and polygamy. But you know what David also did? He repented. Truly repented. There is no better place in Scripture to observe true repentance than in David's Psalm 51. What's more, do you remember from our study of the genealogy in Matthew 1 how the story of David and Bathsheba ends? It ends with Jesus. Bathsheba is Jesus' great-great-great-great grandmother (add a few more greats), which goes to show that, through Jesus, God can redeem any marriage and use it for His glory and the married couples' good.

Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers.

© 2013 by Chris Carr. You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that: (1) you credit the author, (2) any modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include Harmony Bible Church's website address (www.harmonybiblechurch.org) on the copied resource.

¹ Adams, Jay E. 1980. Pg. 94. *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible*; Grand Rapids Michigan. Zondervan.