

Marriage and Divorce

Matthew 19	Mark 10
1 When Jesus had finished these words, he departed from Galilee, and came into the borders of Judea beyond the Jordan.	1 _{a} He arose from there and came into the borders of Judea and beyond the Jordan. Multitudes came together to him again. [...]
2 Great multitudes followed him, and he healed them there.	1 _{b} [...] As he usually did, he was again teaching them.
3 Pharisees came to him, testing him, and saying, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason?” ¹	2 Pharisees came to him testing him, and asked him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”
	3 He answered, “ What did Moses command you? ”
	4 They said, “Moses allowed a certificate of divorce to be written, and to divorce her.” ²
4 He answered, “ Haven’t you read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, ”	6 “ But from the beginning of the creation, God made them male and female. ”
5 _{a} “ and said, ‘For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall be joined to his wife;’ [...]	7 “ For this cause a man will leave his father and mother, and will join to his wife, ”
5 _{b} [...] “ and the two shall become one flesh? ”	8 _{a} “ and the two will become one flesh, ” [...]
6 _{a} “ So that they are no more two, but one flesh. ” [...]	8 _{b} [...] “ so that they are no longer two, but one flesh. ”
6 _{b} [...] “ What therefore God has joined together, don’t let man tear apart. ”	9 “ What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate. ”
7 They asked him, “Why then did Moses command us to give her a certificate of divorce, and divorce her?” ³	

¹ There was a contentious debate during this time between the followers of the rabbis Hillel and Shammai. The former interpreted the Law to mean that a man could divorce his wife for any reason he wanted, while the latter believed that he could only do so if she had committed some kind of sexual misconduct. In Mt 19:3 and Mk 10:2, The Pharisees hoped to pin Jesus’ position down on one of the more controversial questions of the day. In Mt 19:4-6 and Mk 10:3, 6-9, Jesus’ response appealed to the authority of the Mosaic Law and affirmed the Old Testament definition of marriage.

² These certificates (discussed in Dt 24:1-4) protected the wife who was unjustly cast aside. Without this arrangement, a woman could be put out by her husband for any reason and then left without a husband (and therefore without any means of support). She would have to remain destitute or remarry—and in the latter case, she could be accused of adultery without a written certificate of divorce.

³ The question in Mt 19:7 suggests that Hillel’s view was prominent among the Pharisees (and likely, society as a whole). This would also explain why the disciples asked Jesus for clarification privately (Mk 10:10). Jesus took an unpopular and countercultural view on marriage.

Matthew 19	Mark 10
8 _{a} He said to them, “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, allowed you to divorce your wives,” [...]	5 But Jesus said to them, “For your hardness of heart, he wrote you this commandment.” ⁴
8 _{b} [...] “but from the beginning it has not been so.” ⁵	
9 “I tell you that whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and he who marries her when she is divorced commits adultery.” ⁶	
	10 In the house, his disciples asked him again about the same matter.
	11 He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife, and marries another, commits adultery against her.”
	12 “If a woman herself divorces her husband, and marries another, she commits adultery.” ⁷

⁴ The Gospel accounts sometimes present information thematically rather than chronologically, as anyone telling a story may do. In this case, Matthew’s account seems to make more sense chronologically; therefore, I believe that Mk 10:5 may be in its place for thematic rather than chronological reasons. Chronologically, it seems to fit between v 9 and v 10 to correspond with Mt 19:8. The order of events outlined in this chart also reflects the teaching of *The Diatessaron*, sec. 25, one of the earliest texts to harmonize the Gospels (c. 160s AD).

⁵ In Mt 19:8{a}, Jesus means that divorce was not part of God’s original design. Instead, God—through Moses—regulated the practice to protect the innocent from hard-hearted mistreatment.

⁶ There is no contradiction between Jesus’ statements in Mt 19:9, which mentions an exception for adultery, and Mk 10:11, which does not address the issue. These are taken from two different discussions; in the former (Mt), Jesus was confronting the Pharisees with a detailed explanation of how their view stood in contrast with the Scriptures; in the latter (Mk), Jesus was summarizing for the disciples what He had told the Pharisees to emphasize His position.

⁷ This situation, a woman divorcing her husband, was not permitted in Jewish Law, but was possible under Greek and Roman Law. Jesus’ statement in Mk 10:12 again challenges the prevailing cultural view of marriage.