

## DIVORCE

The Pharisees came to Jesus and asked Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?" (Matthew 19:3). The use of the word "lawful" suggests that the Pharisees had reference not to civil law but to God's law. Their motivation in asking this "loaded" question was to diminish the influence of Jesus among the multitudes that followed Him. Whether Jesus answered yes or no to the question, there would be those among the Jews who would reject His answer. Jesus did not give a yes or no answer. Instead He went all the way back to the beginning of the institution of marriage and restated God's original plan for marriage. "And He answered and said to them, 'Have you not read that He who made them at 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 then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate.'" (Matthew 19:4-6). Recognizing the force of Jesus' statement that what God had joined together man was not to separate, the Pharisees then asked, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" Jesus answered "...Moses because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, **but from the beginning it was not so**" (Matthew 19:8). Divorce was not a part of God's original plan for marriage. Yet, Moses was allowed to regulate divorce in his day because of the abuse of the marriage relationship in men putting away their wives for any reason (See Deuteronomy 24:1).

But Jesus was not finished as He declared, "And I say unto you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, (fornication) and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery" (Matthew 19:9). In His authority as the divine Son of God, Jesus gave only one lawful reason for divorce and remarriage of the innocent spouse and that is if and only if one's mate commits fornication. Divorce and remarriage for any other reason results in forming an adulterous unlawful relationship. Even the Lord's disciples recognized the restrictive nature of Jesus answer suggesting that if one cannot put away his mate for just any reason then it's better not to marry (Matthew 19:10)

Jesus answer to the question is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for just any reason is no more popular today that it was when He addressed the Pharisees. However, rejecting what Jesus taught does not change His teaching. What He taught shows the importance and seriousness with which God views the marriage relationship. It would do well for each of us to do the same. Remember, "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled, but fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Hebrews 13:4).