



August 30, 2020  
“Jesus on Divorce”  
Matthew 5:31-32  
Pastor Gary Hamrick

Jesus had many uncomfortable things to say in his Sermon on the Mount. Among the issues he covered was the topic of divorce. And as uncomfortable as the subject is, as followers of Jesus Christ we must have a Biblical understanding of marriage and divorce. In his message today, Pastor Gary teaches about the biblical grounds for divorce, and he teaches this sensitive topic with grace and truth.

### Divorce

1. Pastor Gary said, “I say it’s a hard part of [Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount] because the bar that Jesus [set] concerning this topic of divorce is higher than the bar that our culture has set. [In today’s culture the bar is] no-fault divorce based on irreconcilable differences. [Marriage is about irreconcilable differences!]”
2. Pastor Gary said, “Divorce is one of those topics that is somewhat uncomfortable, and I’m going to be sensitive to everyone because the fact of the matter is that the subject of divorce impacts people in deep, emotional ways, either as spouses who have gone through it, [or] children who are part of a family where there has been a divorce of a mom or dad. Friends [are] impacted too in the whole process. When a divorce happens, it is not limited, in terms of its impact, to just the husband and wife. There’s a whole circle of people who [are] impacted when a divorce happens. [Let’s not forget parents of the husband and wife who get divorced.] ... There’s a lot of difficulty, there’s a lot of mess, there’s a lot of challenges when divorce happens. And while I’m aware of how painful divorce can be... I’m also aware of how needful understanding the topic can be for the sake of... those who are going to be married. You need to know what God says about marriage and divorce. For those who are married, you need to understand and be encouraged to stay married where [it is] and when [it is] possible. For those of you who have been divorced,

you need God's healing."

### 3. Statistics

- a. Sadly, a divorce happens every thirty-six seconds, which means that there are approximately twenty-four hundred divorces per day in the United States.
- b. The divorce rate for first marriages is forty-two percent.
- c. The divorce rate for second marriages is sixty percent.
- d. The divorce rate for third marriages is seventy-three percent.
- e. Pastor Gary said, "I have said myself, erroneously, that the divorce rate in the Church is about equal to the divorce rate outside the Church."
- f. Focus on the Family commissioned a study that was done by Dr. W. Bradford Wilcox, a leading sociologist at the University of Virginia, who is also the Director of the National Marriage Project.<sup>1 2</sup>
  - i. Separating nominal Christians from those who are serious about their Christian faith is a critical factor in understanding the divorce rate in the Church.
  - ii. Nominal Christians were twenty percent more likely to divorce than the general population.
    1. Nominal Christians are those who don't regularly read the Bible, are irregular in their church attendance, and aren't really devoted and committed followers of Jesus.
  - iii. Devoted Christians were thirty-five percent less likely to divorce than the general population.
    1. Devoted Christians read the Bible, are regular in their attendance, and live life as a committed follower of Jesus.

### 4. **Matthew 5:31-32** - *"Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery."*

- a. Jesus quoted from the Old Testament.
  - i. **Deuteronomy 24:1** - *"When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, ... he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house..."*
- b. There was great debate in Jesus' day about what Moses meant when he spoke about the husband finding uncleanness in his wife.
  - i. The Shammai school of thought, which was a more conservative and traditional view, believed Moses meant serious sexual sin or adultery.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/divorce-rate-in-the-church-as-high-as-the-world/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://nationalmarriageproject.org/about/director/>

- ii. The Hillel school of thought, which was very liberal, believed Moses made a broad statement that could mean anything that displeased the husband.
  - c. School of Hillel
    - i. Examples of grounds for divorce include:
      1. When the wife did not find grace in the sight of the husband, which is to say that he no longer found her to be attractive.
      2. When the wife went out in public with her hair loose.
      3. When the wife spun around in public.
      4. When the wife had a conversation with any man.
      5. When the wife burned the husband's dinner.
      6. When the wife was considered to be a noisy woman, meaning that her voice could be heard outside of her home.
  - d. School of Shammai
    - i. Marital unfaithfulness was the only legal basis for divorce.
      1. The Hebrew for uncleanness is *ervat debar*, which means exposure of a thing or nakedness of a matter.
      2. The basic understanding of the Hebrew is that of a shameful act.
      3. Divorce was not to be about any trivial matter; divorce was about the serious matter of unfaithfulness.
  - e. Pastor Gary said, "Jesus did not say that sexual sin mandates a divorce. [Jesus was] not saying that adultery requires [a divorce]. ... There have been many marriages that have survived adultery and have experienced healing by God's grace. Adultery is not necessarily a death sentence on a marriage, provided that the one who betrayed the covenant is remorseful and repentant, and that the other spouse is willing to forgive. Only through repentance and forgiveness can God restore what was broken. ... It's not easy; it takes work, but nothing is impossible with God. Now, in saying all of that, I don't intend to shame anyone who ended up getting a divorce because of adultery. Sometimes the pain is too deep to recover from."

## 5. Biblical Grounds for Divorce

### a. Adultery

- i. **Matthew 5:31-32** - *"Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery."*
- ii. **Matthew 19:1-10** - *"Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these sayings, that He departed from Galilee and came to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them there. The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying*

to Him, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?' 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"?<sup>3</sup> 'So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.' They said to Him, 'Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?' He said to them, 'Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.' His disciples said to Him, 'If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry.' "

b. Abandonment

- i. **1 Corinthians 7:10-16** - "Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife. But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?"

6. Separation

- a. Pastor Gary said, "There may be many reasons for separation. The Bible makes allowance for separation, especially [when] women in particular feel threatened or unsafe. Get out of the house. You may not feel that you have [biblical grounds] for divorce, but you should never stay in a place where you are in harm's way. Please, go somewhere where it [is safe]. ... The Bible allows separation as a process for healing towards reconciliation. [This] is different from our culture. Our culture [believes] that separation is a steppingstone and often a legal prerequisite to divorce. ... [The culture also believes it's okay] to start dating and 'playing the field' again... Separation is intended for reconciliation. ... You say, 'Does God expect me to stay in a loveless

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<sup>3</sup> **Genesis 2:24**

marriage?’ Sometimes [he does]. [Could it be that] God is teaching you something about perseverance through suffering [or forgiveness or unconditional love]? [Could it be that] there is a similar parallel, not just in your marriage, but in your own walk with God? [God] loves you unconditionally, but [could it be that] you haven’t been as loving toward him in the same way that your spouse hasn’t been very loving towards you? And yet, [God] hasn’t abandoned you. [Could it be] that God wants you to learn how to keep your oath? There could be a whole host of reasons why it is better to stay married and honor God than pursue a divorce without biblical grounds and dishonor God. ... [Happiness] is not the goal of life in the Bible. In fact, what the Bible often teaches us by instruction and by way of example is how to experience God’s peace in the midst of strife, joy in the midst of difficulty, <sup>4</sup> [and] contentment in the midst of chaos. What God wants more than [our] happiness is for our lives to give glory to him. And sometimes that means that we persevere when life is not always that happy.”

### Conclusion

7. Pastor Gary said, “[For those who have experienced divorce,] you can’t go back and fix things. So, what you need to do is [to decide to make] your life, and marriage, [if you are remarried,] to honor God. Divorce is not the unpardonable sin. Our sin is great, but God’s grace is greater still. Walk in his forgiveness [and] walk in his grace.”

### Discussion Questions

1. Read [Matthew 5:31-32](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Read and discuss Pastor Gary’s comments and the statistics he shared. (See #1 through #3 above)
3. Read and discuss [Deuteronomy 24:1](#). (See #4a above)
4. Spend time talking about the School of Hillel and the School of Shammai. (See #4b, #4c, and #4d above)
5. Read and discuss Pastor Gary’s comments about the goal of separation. (See #4e above)
6. Spend considerable time reading the Scriptures and discussing Pastor Gary’s points concerning grounds for divorce. (See #5 above)

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<sup>4</sup> [Psalm 15:4](#) - “... who keeps his oath even when it hurts...” (1984 NIV)

7. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's remarks about separation. (See #6 above)
8. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

\* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)