

**16<sup>th</sup> April 2023**

**Genesis 1:27-28**

<sup>27</sup> So God created mankind in his own image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> God blessed them and said to them, "*Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.*"

**Genesis 2:18-25**

<sup>18</sup> The Lord God said, "*It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.*"

<sup>19</sup> Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. <sup>20</sup> So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. <sup>21</sup> So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. <sup>22</sup> Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

<sup>23</sup> The man said,  
"This is now bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
she shall be called 'woman,'  
for she was taken out of man."

<sup>24</sup> *That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.*

<sup>25</sup> Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

## **Matthew 19:1-12**

### **Divorce**

When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. <sup>2</sup> Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. <sup>3</sup> Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" <sup>4</sup> "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,"

<sup>5</sup> and said, '*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh*'? <sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two, but one flesh. *Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.*"

<sup>7</sup> "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?"

<sup>8</sup> Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives *because your hearts were hard*.

But it was not this way from the beginning. <sup>9</sup> I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."

<sup>10</sup> The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry."

<sup>11</sup> Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. <sup>12</sup> For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."

## Marriage, Divorce and Celibacy (Genesis 1:27-28; 18-25 & Matthew 19:1-12)

G'Day Church Family

Please have your Bibles in front of you – opened at Matthew 19:1-12

There's the usual **outline** for you to **take notes** – if that helps you **concentrate**.

Let me ask **God** for His **help** and **guidance** first – let's **pray**...

### Intro/Statistics

Based on **figures** released by the **Australian Bureau of Statistics**

[Slide 1-Stats]

[<https://www.sexualhealthaustralia.com.au/interesting-stats1.html>]

- **Approximately ONE in THREE first marriages end in divorce**
- **Most people who divorce have been married less than 10 years**
- **Women are the Main Initiators of Divorce**
- **12% of marriages are **second marriages****
- **16% of marriages involved one spouse who was **entering into their second marriage**.**
- **Unfortunately, statistically, a **second** (or third) **marriage** is more likely to fail than a first marriage. In fact, up to **60% of second marriages will also end in divorce**.**

Even **Christian marriages** are **not safe from divorce** either.

Recent **research shows** that the risk of divorce in Christian marriages is reduced when couples regularly attend church services together. However, divorce in Christian marriages is **still higher than we would like it to be**.

<https://www.etrernitynews.com.au/world/divorce-does-faith-make-a-difference/>

### [Slide 2-Reasons]

The **top 5 reasons** for divorce in Australia

1. Domestic violence or emotional abuse
2. Poor communications skills
3. Infidelity or extra-marital affairs
4. Alcohol or Substance abuse
5. Financial problems

Whatever the reason given for a divorce –there are **really 3 true causes of divorce**

### [Slide 3a-Cause 1]

1. **Antinomianism** – Literally being **against God's Law** – by not taking God's moral laws seriously – **failing to keep God's commandments** in the Bible - abandoning these moral laws in a marriage – **failing to love one another as the Bible says** – and **breaking marriage vows that were made before God** - by having affairs and committing adultery or other sexually immoral behaviour

### [Slide 3b-Cause 2]

2. **Narcissism** – where someone has an **extremely self-centred personality** characterized by having **an excessive preoccupation with themselves** and their own needs, often at the expense and exclusion of others

### [Slide 3c-Cause 3]

3. **Hedonism** – where **seeking pleasure is the main aim in life** - ahead of anything or anyone else

A **cocktail of these three causes** [or all three at once] – will bring any marriage undone!

In Jesus' time – **divorce was very common** – as it is today!

And so, we pick up our NT passage from Matthew 19 – at verse 3

Where the **Pharisees bring a question** about divorce to Jesus

### A Question about Divorce (Matthew 19:3; Deuteronomy 24:1)

Look at v3 – *Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”*

Notice v3 says the Pharisees have come to test Jesus.

At the time of Jesus there were **two schools of thought** about divorce

The **two schools of thought** were **based on how Deuteronomy 24:1** was interpreted.

[Slide 4-Deut 24:1]

In Deuteronomy 24:1 Moses says: *If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds **something indecent about her**, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house ...*

What does it mean by “**something indecent about her**”

Rabbi Shammai's school understood **indecent** to mean: **sexual immorality** and said that was the **only valid** reason for divorce.

Rabbi Hillel's school understood **indecent** to mean: any sort of indiscretion,  
even to the point where for some Rabbis, **burning a husband's breakfast** was  
considered valid grounds for divorce.

So, in their question, the **Pharisees tried to get Jesus to side with one teaching or the other.**

If Jesus agreed with the relaxed school of Rabbi Hillel, it was clear that Jesus did  
not take the Law of Moses seriously.

If Jesus agreed with the strict school of Rabbi Shammai, then Jesus might  
become unpopular with the multitude, who generally liked access to an easy  
divorce. The religious leaders had reason to believe they had **caught Jesus in a**  
**real dilemma.**

### Jesus' Answer from Creation (Matthew 19:4-6; Genesis 1:27-28; 2:18-25)

[Slide 5a-Creation]

But - **Jesus ignores** the **two schools of thought** and **current popular opinions**

And **He returns to God's Word** at the time of Creation

A lesson for us – to **always come back to what God says!**

From our Old Testament reading from **Genesis 2:18** – the only thing that was  
not "good" about Creation was the fact that **the man [Adam] was alone.**

Therefore, **God gave Adam a suitable helper**, a woman – a wife - **Eve.**

Not another man and not a dog or a cat!

**Marriage** also made possible the **continuance of the human race** – because God  
 told the man and woman in **Genesis 1:28 to be fruitful and increase in number.**

In our NT reading from Matthew 19 - verses 4 to 6 –**Jesus describes how God ordained marriage from the very beginning** – with the first two people - Adam and Eve – and Jesus quotes from Genesis 2:24.

*‘For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So, they are no longer two, but one flesh’*

From Jesus’ reply we can say this about marriage:

[Slide 5b-Marriage is]

- Marriage is divinely ordained by God – and He defines the rules for marriage – not human beings
- Marriage is a faithful and exclusive union – man and woman come together at the exclusion of everyone else.
- Marriage is a permanent, lifelong union - because the Hebrew word for the husband and wife to be united – literally means glued together – a bit like **superglue** – it should be impossible for the two people to become unstuck.

There’s no divorce in God’s definition of marriage. That’s why Jesus says *“Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate”*.

- And marriage is a union between one man and one woman. Not two men, not two women – not two men and one woman – or two women and one man.
- And notice in the marriage *“they are no longer two but one flesh”*. This is more than the physical oneness of a sexual union, but the **deeper oneness**

of two beings becoming one. You may hear people say they are “soul mates”.

### A Question about Mosaic Law on Divorce (Matthew 19:7)

The Pharisees know that the **current situation where a divorce can be granted easily** – disagrees with God’s definition of marriage from Creation - and the divorce rules of Deuteronomy 24 given by Moses – **don’t line up with what Jesus just said about marriage** – and so the Pharisees ask a **follow up question** in verse 7.

[Slide 6-Question?]

*“Why then, did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?”*

In other words, if God intended marriage to be a lifelong union, why did Moses command divorce?

### Jesus’ Answer on Divorce (Matthew 19:8-9)

Again, **Jesus’ reply is emphatic** – in verses 8 and 9

[Slide 7-Jesus’ answer]

Jesus says Moses **permitted** divorce – he did not command it!

Jesus says **Moses permitted divorce because people’s hearts were hard.**

Their **hearts were hard** because of the three causes of divorce we mentioned earlier – because of antinomianism [not taking God’s laws and commandments seriously – God’s laws are just guidelines], **narcissism** [they loved themselves more than anyone else – their relationships were all about satisfying their



needs] and **hedonism** [they loved pleasure – so let’s find a more interesting wife than the one we have]

Jesus says **Moses permitted divorce but God didn’t have divorce in His blueprint for marriage at the beginning!**

Jesus says **divorce is not allowed** – except for one condition –that is in v9 - except for sexual immorality –

The Greek word used is ***porneia*** – and it’s where we get our English word ***pornography*** from. The word covers: **adultery; fornication; homosexuality; lesbianism; intercourse with animals; intercourse with close relatives and pedophilia.**

Jesus goes on to say that if anyone divorces their spouse for any other reason than *porneia* (sexual immorality) –and then remarries - then they are **committing adultery.**

The reason for this exception is because sexual immorality would be breaking God’s plan of “one flesh” for marriage.

The Apostle Paul gives another exception in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16

In the case where a believer is married to an unbeliever – and **the unbeliever leaves the marriage; the believer is to let the unbeliever go.**

If the couple remain together, it may be that the unbeliever is saved for Jesus by the witness of their believing spouse!

The **Bible is silent on the issue of physical or emotional abuse** as a reason for divorce, although it is obvious what God expects a marriage to look like (Ephesians 5:22–33), and abuse is contrary to everything godly.

**Physical violence against a spouse is immoral** and should not be tolerated by anyone. Godly wisdom says, no one should remain in an unsafe environment, whether it involves a family member, friend, employer, caregiver, or stranger.

**Physical abuse is also against the law,** and civil authorities should be the first ones contacted if abuse occurs.

**A spouse who is being abused should immediately seek a safe place.** If there are children involved, they should also be protected and removed from the situation. There is nothing unbiblical about separating from an abuser; in fact, it is morally right to protect oneself and one's children.

To sum up then - Jesus' view [and God's view] on marriage – is that marriage is - **an exclusive, faithful, lifelong – till death do us part union between a man and woman.** And **divorce is not to be considered other than for the exceptions mentioned.**

To give some idea of how sacred God held marriage – In the Old Testament - **adultery was punishable by the death penalty** (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22) – but by Jesus' time – the **death penalty does not seem to have been used** (although appealed for in John 8:1 – and yet with Joseph and Mary – Joseph was going to divorce Mary rather than have her stoned to death)

## Jesus' conclusion on Celibacy (Matthew 19:10-12)

[Slide 8-Celibacy]

Understandably when the disciples hear Jesus' answer on divorce is so different to the regularity of divorce in their day – they say – in v10 – *it's better not to get married at all* – than to break God's rules by divorcing over anything– and so **they say - it's better to stay celibate!**

**Celibate** means: *abstaining from marriage and sexual relations.*

But Jesus points out in v11 – **celibacy is a calling** – it's not for everyone – only for those who can accept it (like Jesus Himself did).

So, in v12 – **Jesus uses the term eunuch which means a castrated human male.** **Eunuchs were often used as superintendents/guards of harem's – because they would be less inclined for sexual relations and therefore safe to be guards of women.**

In Greek the word for eunuch can also be used to describe someone who abstains from marriage.

Jesus gives three types of eunuchs:

- a. Those **BORN without the capacity for sex or marriage** – they might have some physical or emotional problems from birth
- b. Those who were **MADE by others to not have the capacity for sex or marriage** – they may have responsibilities in society – for example an **only child** might have to take care of an ageing parent – so they never get married.
- c. Those who **CHOOSE to abstain from sex and marriage for the sake of the Kingdom** – for example - **so that they can devote more time to the Lord's work.**

Those in this category need to have peace about their celibacy – both physically and spiritually; it should **not** be a constant torment to them.

### Application for us

[Slide 9-Heading]

So, what can we take home today – about marriage, divorce and celibacy?

[Slide 9a]

- a. **1<sup>st</sup> Marriage is a picture of God's relationship with His people** [Ezekiel 16; Hosea 1-2). Marriage is a picture of Jesus' relationship with His Church. Both of these relationships require exclusive, faithful, lifelong commitment – no other gods but God/Jesus.

Human marriages are to reflect the same characteristics.

**In Ephesians 5 – The Apostle Paul says - a husband is to love His wife like Christ loved the church? How did Christ love the Church? – He died for it.**

Therefore, **Husbands are to love their wives with a to die for love.**

**Wives are called to submit to husbands. They will have no problem submitting and following the lead of their husband - IF he loves like Jesus loved the church - they will follow their husband to the moon and back. If their husbands don't love their wives like Christ loved the church – the wife will not follow them to the mailbox.**

When Jesus says the *“the two become one flesh”* - One flesh means we die to self and give to the other - just like Christ died on the cross. **Marriage is about dying to self – and looking to the others interest first.**

(pause)

[Slide 9b]

b. 2<sup>nd</sup> **We are meant to be God's image bearers – reflecting God's glory and holiness. It will not do if Christian marriages are no better than non-Christian marriages – *we are not meant to conform to the pattern of the world* (Romans 12:2). What message do we send to unbelievers if we are no different to the world in our marriages.**

**Focusing on our marriages working - rather than entertaining the idea of divorce - will keep marriages together. We need to **pray for our marriages****

[Slide 9c-concession]

c. 3<sup>rd</sup> **Divorce is a concession – not a command. Jesus did not command divorce even in the case of unfaithfulness. There is **always the possibility of reconciliation rather than separation and divorce**. Even if there has been unfaithfulness, the offending party can repent and recommit.**

[Slide 9d-consequences]

d. 4<sup>th</sup> **There are many consequences of a divorce – which should be considered before taking that step.**

Divorce affects: the **children in the marriage; the parents and the grandparents who might not be able to see their grandchildren** anymore.

Most of us here today – will have been **touched by the effects of divorce** in some way.

There are also consequences like: **trusting someone again** may be an issue; there maybe **physical and emotional damage**, and **financial implications**.

**These consequences may live on, way beyond the failed marriage**. We need to **pray for people who have suffered in this way**.

[Slide 9e-repent]

- e. 5<sup>th</sup> **Because of hard hearts and sinfulness, there will be some marriages that still end in divorce – caused by – selfishness, unfaithfulness, domestic violence, abuse etc.**

What's the way forward for people who have experienced divorce?

**We can repent of anything that we did to contribute to the marriage ending- just like we can repent of any sin we commit.**

1 John 1:9. Says: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

And what about other relationships in our lives; are we being faithful in them?

Do we need to repent of any unfaithfulness in these relationships?

What about our relationship with Jesus?

Are we being faithful in this relationship? Or are we committing spiritual adultery **by putting something or someone ahead of Him?** We need to confess that unfaithfulness too!

[Slide 9f-celibacy]

- f. 6<sup>th</sup> **Celibacy is good for those who can accept it;** and it allows people to spend more time and effort in serving the Lord and serving others!

**Conclusion (John 13:34-35)**

[Slide 10-Conclusion]

**To conclude then...**

In all our relationships – whether in marriages or with family and friends – are we following Jesus' new command - from John 13:34-35 – which we will finish with?

*<sup>34</sup> "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

By following Jesus' command – **people will see the love of Jesus in action** -and **might be attracted to follow Him too!**

Let's pray...

*Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of love in marriages – which is a picture of the marriage between you and your people – and a picture of the marriage between Jesus and His Church.*

*Thank you that Jesus showed a perfect example of sacrificial love in laying down His life for His Church.*

*Help us to repent of any unfaithfulness in our relationships and give us strength to cope with any consequences we endure because of past broken relationships.*

*Thank you that celibacy is also a gift and a calling to some – so that they may focus their attention on serving you and others – for your Kingdom's sake.*

*Help us to model the love of Jesus in all our relationships – so that others see the love of Jesus in us – and come to follow Him as their Lord and Saviour.*

*In His name, we pray. Amen.*