

Honor
Divorce and Remarriage
Clay Weed

TALK IT OVER

Key Scripture:

Matthew 19:3–6 (NLT)

3 Some Pharisees came and tried to trap him with this question: "Should a man be allowed to divorce his wife for just any reason?"

4 "Haven't you read the Scriptures?" Jesus replied. "They record that from the beginning 'God made them male and female.' 5 And he said, 'This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.' 6 Since they are no longer two but one, let no one split apart what God has joined together."

Malachi 2:14–16 (NLT)

14 You cry out, "Why doesn't the LORD accept my worship?" I'll tell you why! Because the LORD witnessed the vows you and your wife made when you were young. But you have been unfaithful to her, though she remained your faithful partner, the wife of your marriage vows.

15 Didn't the LORD make you one with your wife? In body and spirit you are his. And what does he want? Godly children from your union. So guard your heart; remain loyal to the wife of your youth. 16 "For I hate divorce!" says the LORD, the God of Israel. "To divorce your wife is to overwhelm her with cruelty," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies. "So guard your heart; do not be unfaithful to your wife."

Matthew 5:31–32 (NLT)

31 "You have heard the law that says, 'A man can divorce his wife by merely giving her a written notice of divorce.' 32 But I say that a man who divorces his wife, unless she has been unfaithful, causes her to commit adultery. And anyone who marries a divorced woman also commits adultery.

Ephesians 5:21–30 (NLT)

Start **talking**. Find a conversation starter for your group.

- Share a funny or surprising story about a wedding you attended. What was something memorable that happened?

Start **sharing**. These questions are to help get your group thinking and to create openness.

- **Read Matthew 19:3-6.** Why does Jesus reference Genesis in His response about divorce to the Pharisees?
- Discuss the first-century context provided in the sermon about the differing schools of thought on divorce (Shammai, Hillel, Akiba). How does this background help us understand Jesus' stance on marriage?
- **Malachi 2:14-16** describes God's feelings about divorce. What does it mean that God "witnessed the vows" made in marriage?
- Pastor Clay explained the difference between a contract and a covenant in marriage. How does seeing marriage as a covenant change the way we approach marital challenges?
- **Read Matthew 5:31-32.** What is Jesus teaching about divorce in this passage? Discuss the implications of this for how we support friends or family members going through marital difficulties.
- How can the church community support those who have experienced divorce or are struggling in their marriages?
- Discuss how the New Covenant under Jesus influences our understanding and approach to marriage and divorce.
- In **Ephesians 5:21-30**, Paul uses beautiful imagery of a husband and wife compared to Christ and His Church. What does this teach us about marriage and salvation?

Start **doing**. Commit to a step and live it out this week.

- Identify one action you can take this week to strengthen your marriage.

Start **praying**. Be bold and pray with power.

- Lord, we thank You for the gift of marriage and the teachings You provide on honoring our commitment. Help us to reflect Your love and faithfulness in our relationships. Strengthen us to uphold the vows made and to walk in love, patience, and forgiveness. Guide those among us who are facing challenges, and may Your wisdom lead us in every action. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Question: "Why does God hate divorce?"

Answer: Malachi 2:16 is the oft-quoted passage that tells how God feels about divorce. "I hate divorce," says the Lord God of Israel.* But this passage says much more than that. If we back up to verse 13, we read, "You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. But you say, 'Why does he not?' Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth."

We learn several things from this passage. First, God does not listen to the pleas for blessing from those who have broken the covenant of marriage. First Peter 3:7 says, "Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered" (emphasis added). There is a direct correlation between the way a man treats his wife and the effectiveness of his prayers.

God clearly explains His reasons for esteeming marriage so highly. He says it was He who "made them one" (Malachi 2:15). Marriage was God's idea. If He designed it, then He gets to define it. Any deviation from His design is abhorrent to Him. Marriage is not a contract; it is a covenant. Divorce destroys the whole concept of covenant that is so important to God.

In the Bible, God often provides illustrations to teach spiritual realities. When Abraham offered his son Isaac on the altar, it was a picture of the day, hundreds of years later, that the Lord God would offer His only Son (Genesis 22:9; Romans 8:32). When God required blood sacrifices for the forgiveness of sin, He was painting a picture of the perfect sacrifice He Himself would make on the cross (Hebrews 10:10).

Marriage is a picture of the covenant God has with His people (Hebrews 9:15). A covenant is an unbreakable commitment, and God wants us to understand how serious it is. When we divorce someone with whom we made a covenant, it makes a mockery of the God-created concept of covenant relationship. The Church (those individuals who have received Jesus as Savior and Lord) is presented in Scripture as the "Bride of Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2; Revelation 19:7-9). We, as His people, are "married" to Him through a covenant that He established. A similar illustration is used in Isaiah 54:5 of God and Israel.

When God instituted marriage in the Garden of Eden, He created it as a picture of the greatest unity human beings can know (Genesis 2:24). He wanted us to understand the unity we can have with Him through redemption (1 Corinthians 6:17). When a husband or wife chooses to violate that covenant of marriage, it mars the picture of God's covenant with us.

Malachi 2:15 gives us another reason that God hates divorce. He says He is "seeking godly offspring." God's design for the family was that one man and one woman commit themselves to each other for life and rear children to understand the concept of covenant as well. Children reared in a healthy, two-parent home have a far greater likelihood of establishing successful marriages themselves.

When Jesus was asked why the Law permitted divorce, He responded that God had only allowed it "because of the hardness of your hearts, but from the beginning it was not so" (Matthew 19:8). God never intended divorce to be a part of human experience, and it grieves Him when we harden our hearts and break a covenant that He created.