

JESUS: THE SERVANT AT WORK

VOLUME TWO

STUDY EIGHTEEN

According to Jesus . . . What About Divorce?

Mark 10:1–12

Our opinions are really broad because we have not limited our thinking to God's book.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

EVERYONE has an opinion on divorce. Our opinions may be based on books we've read or on speakers who have influenced us. Experiencing divorce personally or watching a loved one navigate it plays the most influential role in forming our opinions.

As a result, some wonder whether marriage is worth the risk. They ask, "Why marry at all?" By living together, they reason, they can avoid the pain and cost of a messy divorce. Some hold an easy-divorce opinion. They see divorce as a healthy option when love fades and the relationship no longer fulfills them. Instead of working to heal the marriage, they embrace divorce as a path to freedom and personal growth. Others hold the never-divorce opinion. They say that divorce is never acceptable, even in cases of infidelity, abuse, addiction, and child molestation.

So many opinions! How do we know what's right?

The most reliable source of truth on any subject—particularly on this subject—is the sacred Scriptures. Marriage is God's idea, so who better to teach us about it than Jesus, God's Son, and His apostles, who wrote under divine inspiration?

In the passage for this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we'll let the Holy Spirit communicate to our hearts divine wisdom concerning marriage, divorce, and remarriage. It's a murky subject, but Jesus shines a light through it to help us see clearly God's way for couples and families.



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

*“My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,”
says the LORD.*

“And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.” (Isaiah 55:8)

Acknowledge that God’s thoughts and ways are different from human understanding. Surrender your life and submit your plans to Him. Boldly choose to trust in His perfect wisdom.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Moses was the first of God’s spokespersons to teach about divorce and remarriage. In ancient times, only men could initiate a divorce. So to protect wives against their husbands’ tossing them out to live on the streets, Moses said that a husband could give his wife “a certificate of divorce” (Deuteronomy 24:1 NASB). This document allowed her to remarry. According to Moses, husbands could divorce their wives only if they “found some indecency in her” (24:1 NASB).

What qualified as “indecent”? In Jesus’ day, two respected rabbis dominated public opinion on the definition of *indecency*. The school of Shammai insisted it meant adultery. The more liberal school of Hillel interpreted “indecency” as *any* shortcoming. Commentator William Barclay elaborates:

They said that it could mean if the wife spoiled a dish of food, if she spun in the streets, if she talked to a strange man, if she spoke disrespectfully of her husband’s relations in his hearing. . . .

Human nature being as it is, it was the laxer view which prevailed. The result was that divorce for the most trivial reasons, or for no reason at all, was tragically common.¹

With this contentious context in mind, let’s step into the scene with Jesus where a group of Pharisees challenges Him to state His view on divorce.

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Observation: According to Jesus . . . What About Divorce?

Observation is taking a close look at the words of the text. As you read, look closely at where the action took place, what happened, and what was said.²

The Setting—Mark 10:1

The opening lines in [Mark 10:1](#) give the setting. In the previous chapter, Jesus was sitting in a house in Capernaum in Galilee. Now He was on His way to Jerusalem—the final journey of His earthly ministry. On your Bible map or the [online map](#) at insight.org, locate the region known as Perea, east of Jerusalem and across the Jordan River. Why do you think this setting is significant? Review [1:4–14](#) to see other key events that occurred in this general area.

Dialogue with the Pharisees—Mark 10:2–9

Read [Mark 10:2–9](#). The Pharisees asked, “Should a man be allowed to divorce his wife?” Matthew added in his account the phrase “for just any reason?” (Matthew 19:3)—which was implied in Mark. Why did the Pharisees ask Him this question?

The word could mean “tempting Him.” Hoping to trap Him is the idea, putting Him on the spot. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Instead of rabbinic traditions, Jesus pointed to the Scriptures for the answer. What did Jesus say in Mark 10:3–5? How did Jesus explain Moses’ teaching?

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According to Mark 10:6–9, what was God’s plan for marriage?

Discussion with His Disciples—Mark 10:10–12

Read [Mark 10:10–12](#). Later in private, Jesus’ disciples “began questioning Him about this” (Mark 10:10 NASB). What did Jesus add in 10:11–12? What exception did Matthew include in his account (Matthew 19:9)?

Let me add something very important here. He permitted divorce, but, I repeat, He didn’t command it. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Jesus Permitted Divorce for Sexual Immorality

The Pharisees’ question was a trap in more ways than one. It could entangle Him in the Shammai–Hillel controversy, but it could also get Him in trouble with Herod Antipas. This region was where John the Baptizer confronted Antipas about marrying Herodias, who had divorced her husband Philip to marry Antipas. John was arrested and beheaded, and perhaps the Pharisees were hoping Jesus would meet the same fate.

Stepping into this minefield of potential dangers, Jesus confidently stated God’s view of marriage. According to [Genesis 2:21–25](#) and [Mark 10:6–8](#), what is God’s intention for marriage? What did Jesus mean when He concluded: “Therefore, what God has joined together, no person is to separate” (Mark 10:9 NASB)? The meaning of the Greek word *apolyo* is “send away,” although the process was more complicated than it sounds. Now, look up [10:1–12](#) in *Constable’s Notes* at [netbible.org](#). Why was this question such a trap for Jesus?

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Because divorce doesn't separate what God has joined, to remarry would be adulterous in God's eyes. Jesus stated an exception in Matthew 19:9: "whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery" (NASB). Look at the Greek word *porneia* for "sexual immorality." What sins does this term include?



Correlation: Is This All the Bible Says About Divorce and Remarriage?

Correlation is crucial to obtaining a comprehensive biblical view on a topic, particularly marriage and divorce. How do passages such as *Genesis 2:22–24*; *Malachi 2:13–16*; and *Galatians 6:1* emphasize that restoration should be sought if possible? Why should marriage vows be taken seriously?

If you have a partner guilty of the kind of things I've just described, you're not commanded to walk away from that partner. In Galatians 6:1, "If one who is overtaken in a fault, you who are spiritual, restore one in a spirit of meekness." How great it is that there can be restoration. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Compare what Jesus taught about divorce and remarriage with what Paul taught in *1 Corinthians 7:10–15*. What should a woman *not* do if the unbelieving husband consents to live with her? If the unbelieving spouse deserts the believing spouse, what *can* the believing spouse do?

I take that to mean you're not under the bond of the marriage vows. You are free to go on with your life. A divorce and a remarriage are appropriate. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Jesus addressed divorce as it relates to adultery. Paul addressed abandonment. But what about abuse, addictions, violence, child molestation, and other cases not specified in Scripture? *First Corinthians 6:19–20; Ephesians 5:15; and Titus 2:15* teach principles regarding our bodies and the role of confronting sin. How should believers proceed in cases not specified in the Scriptures?

Nothing is said in Scripture regarding spousal abuse, though we do read that “the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.” And we do read that Titus 2:15 concludes “don’t let anyone abuse you.” The word is “despise” you. It’s a command. There’s nothing in the Scripture that addresses divorce in cases of physical torture, or emotional torture, or the raping of a child, or the killing of children. There’s nothing here that addresses the exposure of family-destroying addictions and perversions and afflictions that if continued will ruin the lives of innocent children and defenseless mates. Nothing here. What does it mean? It means you must use common sense. Living principles are often common sense. So please, think. Every situation. Ideally, reconcile. But when you find yourself in a situation that is irreconcilable after attempt after attempt, and you are finding life is becoming increasingly more dangerous, more frightening, more threatening for you and your children, think! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Respond with Truth

Pastor Chuck suggests three closing principles for applying our passage. First, *don’t let yourself form your opinions based on the climate of our culture*. In what ways do you find the culture influencing your view on marriage and divorce?

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Second, *restrain yourself from self-righteous judgmentalism and legalism*. How can you demonstrate an attitude of humility in your marriage or when you look at others' successful or failed marriages?

Third, *allow yourself to leave room for God's grace to rescue some who are victimized*. Has the Lord brought anyone to your mind who needs rescuing? Why not seek the Lord's strength and guidance on the next steps?

For a more detailed discussion of divorce and remarriage, read Pastor Chuck's booklet *Divorce & Remarriage According to Jesus*, which is available at insight.org. It's easy to get lost in the maze of opinions on this vital subject. Let Scripture be your guide, and you'll find your way through.



A FINAL PRAYER

Meditate on Pastor Chuck's prayer below, as you close this study.

Dear Father, help us amid a crooked and perverted generation to think, to be a voice of hope for those who are defenseless. Give us, in our growing years, a level of maturity that allows for change in our hearts; if necessary, break our hearts anew. And when You do, may grace come rushing in. I ask this in the magnificent name of Jesus, our Savior. Amen. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

ENDNOTES

1. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, rev. ed., The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 239.
2. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page "*How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?*" at insight.org.

For the 2026–2027 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2011, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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