

Mark 10:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away.

Analysis

The Pharisees answered, 'Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away' (Μωϋσῆς ἐπέτρεπεν βιβλίον ἀποστασίου γράψαι καὶ ἀπολῦσαι). They cite Deuteronomy 24:1's provision for divorce certificate (biblion apostasiou, βιβλίον ἀποστασίου, 'certificate of dismissal'). Notably, they changed Jesus' word 'command' (v. 3) to 'suffered' (epetrepsen, ἐπέτρεπεν, 'permitted')—tacitly acknowledging this was concession, not divine ideal. The certificate's purpose was to protect the divorced woman—providing legal documentation of her freedom to remarry without being charged with adultery. This regulation assumed divorce's reality and sought to mitigate harm, but didn't endorse divorce as good. The Pharisees' answer reveals their focus on legal technicalities rather than God's heart for marriage.

Historical Context

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 required a written divorce certificate, protecting women from capricious abandonment without legal recourse. In ancient Near Eastern patriarchal society, divorced women faced severe economic and social disadvantage. The certificate (get in Hebrew, biblion apostasiou in Greek) provided legal proof the marriage was dissolved, allowing remarriage. Without it, a divorced woman remarrying could be charged with adultery (punishable by death, Leviticus 20:10). Moses' law thus regulated an evil practice, preventing worse evil. Jewish divorce procedure in Jesus' day involved witnesses and proper documentation. The debate wasn't whether divorce was legal (Mosaic law permitted it) but under what

circumstances. Jesus would transcend this legal debate by returning to Genesis' creational norm.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does the shift from 'command' to 'permitted' reveal the difference between God's ideal and His accommodation to human sin?
2. What does Moses' protective regulation (requiring a certificate) teach about the role of law in restraining evil's harm even when it cannot eliminate evil?

Interlinear Text

οἱ	δὲ	εἶπον,	Μωσῆς	Ἐπέτρεψεν	βιβλίου	ἀποστασίου
G3588	And	they said	Moses	suffered	a bill	of divorcement
G1161		G2036	G3475	G2010	G975	G647

γράψαι	καὶ	ἀπολῦσαι
to write	and	to put her away
G1125	G2532	G630

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 50:1 (Parallel theme): Thus saith the LORD, Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away.

Jeremiah 3:1 (Parallel theme): They say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? shall not that

land be greatly polluted? but thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the LORD.

Matthew 19:7 (References Moses): They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?

Matthew 1:19 (Parallel theme): Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily.

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