

Matthew 19:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?

Analysis

Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement (βιβλίου ἀποστασίου, *biblion apostasiou*)—The Pharisees' question exposes their fundamental misunderstanding. Moses did not command (ἐντέλλομαι, *entellomai*) divorce; he permitted it as a regulatory concession to human hardness of heart (v. 8). The *biblion apostasiou* (certificate of divorce) in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 was a protective measure for women in a patriarchal society, not divine endorsement of divorce.

Jesus's response redirects them to creation's original design (Gen. 1:27, 2:24), establishing that God's ideal precedes and supersedes Mosaic accommodation. The law regulated sin's consequences without endorsing sin itself—a pattern seen throughout Torah's civil legislation.

Historical Context

In first-century Judaism, the schools of Hillel and Shammai debated the grounds for divorce. Hillel permitted divorce for almost any reason; Shammai restricted it to sexual immorality. The Pharisees sought to trap Jesus by forcing him to choose sides in this contentious rabbinic debate, potentially alienating either the strict or lenient factions.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus's distinction between divine command and Mosaic permission apply to other Old Testament regulations that seem inconsistent with the New Covenant?
2. What does this exchange reveal about the danger of using Scripture to justify what God merely tolerates?
3. How should the church balance Christ's high standard for marriage with pastoral care for those affected by divorce?

Interlinear Text

λέγουσιν	αὐτήν	Τί	οὖν	Μωσῆς	ἐνετείλατο	δοῦναι
They say	her	Why	then	did Moses	command	to give
G3004	G846	G5101	G3767	G3475	G1781	G1325
βιβλίου	ἀποστασίου	καὶ	ἀπολῦσαι	αὐτήν		
a writing	of divorcement	and	away	her		
G975	G647	G2532	G630	G846		

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 5:31 (Parallel theme): It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:

Mark 10:4 (References Moses): And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away.

Malachi 2:16 (Parallel theme): For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.

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 3:8 (Parallel theme): And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also.

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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