

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 (βιβλίον 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

Psalm 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

βιβλίον ἀποστασίου καὶ ἀπολῦσαι αὐτήν
a writing of divorce 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.