

Fact Sheet for **“Divorce Commanded???”**
Ezra 9-10

Pastor Bob Singer
02/25/2018

Today we will be looking at one of the strangest passages on divorce in the Bible.
Read Ezra 9:1-10:17, 44

Let's revisit a couple of verses.

ESV Ezra 10:3 Therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God, and let it be done according to the Law.

Commentaries do identify this *putting* away as divorce. The NLT even translates it that way.

And this was to be done “according to the Law.” The Law clearly stated that they *must not* intermarry with the people of the land for their hearts would be turned away to other gods (Deuteronomy 7:1-4).

Their intermarrying was patently sinful! The words in Ezra 10:3 were actually spoken by the people, but Ezra himself would later give the command.

ESV Ezra 10:11 Now then make confession to the LORD, the God of your fathers and do his will. Separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives."

A few Bible students explain this by saying that Ezra's command was not right. But this viewpoint is definitely in the minority.

The problem with this passage is not so much in the interpretation as it is in its application for today. Does this passage give a Christian who has married someone who is not a Christian the biblical permission to divorce them? *And in reality the Christian would only consider this if they were having difficulties with their marriage.*

A question that I have often been asked is under what circumstances is divorce OK for a Christian? There are the exception passages in the case of adultery (Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12). There is also an exception passage in the case of the unbelieving spouse leaving (1 Corinthians 7:10-15).

Think about this for a second. In the 1 Corinthians 7 passage the Christian should *not* divorce their unbelieving spouse if that spouse consents to live with them. But Ezra 10 seems to say that the believer should divorce an unbelieving spouse. What do you do with this conflicting message? And then you have the Malachi 2 Passage.

NAU Malachi 2:16 "For I hate divorce," says the LORD, the God of Israel, "and him who covers his garment with wrong," says the LORD of hosts. "So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously."

And then you have all those practical problems. What about physical abuse (spouse or children)? What about mental abuse? What if your spouse puts out a contract on your life, is

caught and ends up in prison? What about severe drug or alcohol abuse? What about desertion by a believing spouse? What about marrying someone you never should have married? What is right before God?

The real problem is that we are thinking about marriage and divorce with an absolutely wrong perspective. God is not about sin management! Can you think of any place in the Bible where God says, "If you have a little sin do this, if you have more sin do that"? Or, "This amount of sin is OK, but any more sin isn't"? Instead we have passages like 1 John 1:5-10; 1 Peter 1:14-16; and Matthew 5:48.

Now God created marriage perfectly before Adam and Eve fell (Genesis 2:24).

ESV Genesis 2:24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

What God created included no sin.

Here is a statement of truth. Divorce is *always* a result of sin. This could be his, hers, or both. Here is another statement of truth. God recognizes that divorce regrettably occurs. When we take something that God created perfectly and stir in a little, or a lot, of our sin we end up with something that is broken at best.

Ezra was dealing with a situation where the future of the whole nation of Israel was on the line. They had been conquered by Assyria and Babylon because they left the worship of the one true God and worshiped the idols of the nations they were to dispossess. And it was God who engineered their downfall. They were just now being brought back to the land of Israel by God. But through intermarriage with those who worshiped these idols they were again in danger of being taken away into captivity. Ezra's solution was not perfect, but he and the leaders in Israel at that time felt it was necessary. Were these divorces right? God didn't design these marriages. The people in their sinfulness did. Therefore no solution would have been perfect.

Does this situation give biblical permission for a Christian to divorce an unbelieving spouse? No! Instead it carries a much stronger warning that believers should only marry believers. An unbelieving spouse can draw away the believing spouse from God.

Here are some recommendations.

God's perfect creation for people included marriage.

If you are unmarried and want to be, look for someone who is dedicated to Christ, not just someone who just says they are a Christian. You should see this in their life choices. Only date Christians! Keep yourself pure. Don't mix up God's perfect design for marriage with sin.

Realize that when you get married you are two as one.

If you are married, as far as it depends on you, be committed to Christ and to your spouse for life. Keep yourself pure. Don't sow seeds of destruction in your marriage with your sin.

Remember that should always be three in marriage, you, your spouse, and God.