


# Did Moses give the rules for divorce without God's authority?

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By Kevin Cauley

Did Moses give the rules for divorce without God's authority or did God give this authority?

We read in Deuteronomy 24:1, "When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house." The simple answer to this question is that when God gave Moses the rules for divorce under the Law of Moses, it was authorized by God at that time and for those people. The question, no doubt, arose in the questioner's mind as a result of our study of Matthew 19:7, 8 a few Sunday's ago. In this passage the Pharisees were questioning Jesus regarding marriage and divorce. After Jesus clearly taught that man has no right to sever what God has joined together (Matthew 19:6), the Pharisees ask, "Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?" Jesus replied, "He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so." The questioner asked whether what Moses wrote was authorized by God, and it was. However, what was authorized under the Old Law was not always necessarily that which pleased God.

Under the Old Covenant and prior to the Law of Christ, there is a fine distinction to be made between that which God authorizes and that which is satisfying or pleasing to God. For example, under the Old Law, God authorized animal sacrifices. However, from the New Testament we read, "In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure" (Hebrews 10:6). While animal sacrifices were authorized by God, these sacrifices did not please God in respect to sin. They could not take away the sin of man. What was the sacrifice that was made with which God was satisfied in this respect? It was the sacrifice of Christ (Hebrews 10:12-14). So while God authorized animal sacrifices for a time, they were not the final authority in dealing with sin. The sacrifice of Jesus is the final authority in dealing with sin. So, under the Old Law, God authorized some things that were not pleasing to Him. But why did He do that? Why would God authorize something that was not pleasing to Him?

We read in Acts 17:30, "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent." We also read in Acts 14:16 "Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways." Why would God allow the people of the past to be ignorant? Why would he allow them to "walk in their own ways?" Well, I am not sure that I understand everything that is involved in this, but part of the answer is that God had not completely revealed His will to man. The Old Law that was revealed was a shadow of that which was to come; it was, therefore, incomplete in that it could not make the worshipper perfect (Hebrews 10:1). In Romans 16:25, Paul said that the full revelation of God's will was kept secret since the world began until the time of the gospel. In 1 Peter 1:10-12 we read that even the Old Testament prophets and the angels didn't understand what the plan of God was in the past. However, it has now been revealed to us. So due to the incompleteness of the revelation of God's will to man, God tolerated some practices, and even authorized some, with which He was not completely and fully satisfied. Among such practices was the writing of divorcement under the Old Law. Another such practice was the marrying of multiple

wives which even pre-dates the Old Law. Another such practice would be the siring of children by your dead brother's wife (Deut.25:5). Such things God tolerated, and even authorized, but we must not mistake this for something that is necessarily pleasing to God. They were allowances made by God due to the ignorance and hard heartedness in which man was in prior to the gospel.

Today, we have the gospel and all men are under the authority of Christ. John 17:2 says that God has given Christ authority over all flesh. Matthew 28:18 says that Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. We can be assured that today the authority under which we act is pleasing to God because it was purchased by the perfect sacrifice of Christ and made perfect by His blood. God no longer tolerates these practices as He once did under the Old Law and prior to the Old Law. Acts 17:30 says that all men are now commanded to repent. We must then submit ourselves to the authority of Christ by which we will be judged (John 12:48). Today, Christ's law regarding marriage and divorce is simple. This law goes back to the foundations of marriage as God originally intended it to be as exemplified by Adam and Eve in Genesis 2. This pattern is, one man, one woman, for life and the only exception given is when one spouse commits fornication and then the innocent party may remarry. This is exactly what Jesus states in Matthew 19:9 and it is what we, as Christians—followers of Christ, must respect as well.