

MATTHEW 5:31,32 DIVORCE

We now move into the next section of the Sermon on the Mount. And true to form, Jesus steps right into a hornet's nest. This is the point where people would have said, "Rabbi, now you've quit preaching and gone to meddling." But Jesus didn't back away from the issue. In fact, He took on some of the greatest taboo topics right up front, at the beginning of the sermon. Last week it was adultery. The week before that it was murder. And in each of these little sub-sections we see that Jesus is carrying His teaching so much deeper than anything the people had heard before. Jesus gets to the heart of the matter. He goes beyond the external view of righteousness and penetrates to the heart. Well, true to form, He continues with the hard topics and now launches into the subject of divorce. Let's see what He has to say about the matter.

Mt. 5:31,32

31 "Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' 32 But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.

Once again we read, "It has been said..." Then in the next verse we read, "But I say to you..."

This is another case in which the culture, albeit the religious culture, in this sense, has determined the meaning of the scripture. The debate was out there in the culture. There was a wide gulf between what certain rabbis, the people and especially what God had to say about divorce.

- The Jewish people had a high regard for marriage but a low view of women.
- If a man was not married by age 20, he was thought to be in rebellion to God.
- If a person remained single, they were thought to be in rebellion to God's command to multiply and replenish the earth.
- The Apostle Paul believed there were certain people who were called to be single. (That includes chaste)
- **"A bride was bought, regarded as property, used as a household drudge and dismissed at pleasure." (Bruce)**
- This low view of women, combined with their high view of marriage was a constant source of turmoil because they conflicted with each other.

OT marriage Law – this is what is being quoted here.

Dt. 24:1

1 "When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house,

This was another matter about which the people had been wrongly taught. In fact, there was a wide gulf among the people and teachers of Jesus' day.

Shammai: A very conservative rabbi understood “unclean” to mean sexual immorality.

Conversely, Hillel, a more liberal rabbi, understood “unclean” to mean essentially any reason a man came up with in order to divorce his wife.

- If she cooked him a bad dinner.
- If she spoke to men in the streets.
- If she spoke disrespectfully of his parents in his presence.
- If she spoke in an argumentative way that could be heard next door.
- If he found someone more beautiful or attractive.
- Then she was considered unclean and he could divorce her.
- In this broad line of thinking it was even considered a man’s religious duty to rid himself of a bad wife.
- **“A man who had a bad wife would never face Hell because he had paid for his own sins on this earth.” (Barclay)**
- One school taught that divorce was limited to the core of what marriage is about in terms of faithfulness one to another, the other blew the doors wide open. Which do you think was most popular?
- “I’m not married but my wife is.”
- What was Jesus’ response to this line of thinking?

32 But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.

Look at what Jesus says in MT. 19: 3 – 10

3 The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?"

4 And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' 5 and said, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? 6 So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

7 They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?"

8 He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. 9 And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery."

10 His disciples said to Him, "If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry."

- Jesus agreed with the conservative rabbi.
- Jesus believed in marriage... not shacking up. If you are in this situation, then that needs to be gotten right with God. We can talk. Not to condemn, but to get it right.
- Jesus did not believe in "open marriage" a marriage where there is no expectation of sexual faithfulness.
- The Bible does not see sex as casual. It means something and it should be valued, and stay within the marriage covenant. It means more than pleasure.
- Jesus believed we could control our desires. We are not slaves to our sexual desires, or any other desires. Jesus can bring that part of our lives into conformity with his will.
- What is sexual immorality? "Uncleaness" defined – porneia/porneos; fornication, premarital unchastity, subsequently discovered acts. A broad word, not a narrow one.

- Jesus said that unfaithfulness was grounds for divorce, but divorce was never commanded. Reconciliation is what God wants.
- The Apostle Paul added to this in 1 Cor. 7:15, abandonment by an unbelieving spouse. These are the two Biblical reasons a divorce may be granted.
- This comes across as hard. But it doesn't give "falling out of love" as a reason for divorce. God can resurrect a marriage from "dead love." How many married couples have been through this? (No hands)
- In 1 Cor.7, Paul recognized situations where a couple could separate. Not the best thing, but for a time is allowed.
- What if I have already divorced?

1 Cor. 7:17

- 17 But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. (Marriage is the context)
- Wherever you are right now in regard to marriage or singleness. Don't divorce your second wife to remarry your first one. Don't feel you have to go through an endless line of correcting the past. Ask God's forgiveness and move forward.
- Greco-Roman culture was every bit as licentious as our modern times. But even then the Gospel redeemed lives and it can do so even today. We can be a light and a beacon to those trapped in sinful lifestyles.
- Divorce – like the amputation of a limb. It is never the first choice, but the last option in order to save the person's life.
- Sex has meaning and that is why god says to keep it under the marriage covenant. This is not to restrict us but to give intimacy the opportunity to come to full bloom in a marriage where it is intended. This shows us just how "un-casual" sex is.

- Lost love in marriage can be found again and it can flourish. Pray for restoration.
- Finally, to those that have broken their vows: there is forgiveness and restoration in Jesus Christ.
- To those that have been sinned against in marriage: You have a friend in Jesus. If there is anyone who knows what it is like to be rejected without cause, it is Jesus.
- To those that have sinned in this area, own it. Don't try to justify it. Come to Jesus. You are in good company. Come to a savior who forgives sinners.