

**TEACHINGS OF JESUS (13)**  
**Sermon on the Mount (12)**  
**Divorce and Remarriage**  
**Matthew 5:31-32**

We are continuing our study of the teachings of Jesus, with a current emphasis on the “Sermon on the Mount”, an early lesson in His “ministry” that would set the tone for what He taught and did. We are in the midst of Jesus explaining how our righteousness must be pleasing to God and thus it must “exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees” (5:20). Jesus proceeded to give 6 examples of how this is the case. We have discussed 2 of them (murder & anger and adultery & lust). Today, we notice a third example – this one dealing with divorce and remarriage.

Like the previous topic, this is an uncomfortable topic, but it needs to be addressed, especially in light of the times we are living in – with high divorce rates for any cause, as well as a rejection of the importance and sacredness of marriage. It is also a controversial subject as it is debated over exactly what circumstances apply to what is said today – namely who has the right to remarry after a divorce. This is a complex subject which we do not have time to address in this lesson (that is not our purpose today), though we will clearly see some of what God HAS instructed concerning this subject.

So today we want to address this text and make some applications for our times.

**I. The text**

a. “Furthermore, it has been said” ...

i. **“Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce...”**

Based on Deuteronomy 24:1-4. In that text we find a specific circumstance where divorce was permitted under the LOM. It involved a man who took a wife and he finds some “uncleanness in her” (what exactly that involves is not specified) and thus he writes her a certificate of divorce. She then becomes another man’s wife and if the LATTER husband divorces her or he dies, the command was that the first husband was NOT to take her back (because she has been defiled). That was the SPECIFIC situation that Moses addressed.

ii. How had they manipulated this doctrine? There could be many ways they did this:

1. **For any cause** - They might have viewed that as long as the man gave the certificate of divorce to put away his wife, he was not sinning, REGARDLESS of the reason. This disregarded the specifics of the text – the ONLY text in the LOM that addressed this subject.

Consider Matthew 19:1-9ff, esp. vs. 3 where the Pharisees ask Jesus, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?” (NKJV)

2. **They also disregarded God’s intent of marriage** to be one man and one woman for life. Genesis 2:22-24 – where Moses expounds on Adam and Eve and how that shows what marriage IS SUPPOSED to be. Again, Jesus in Matthew 19:4-6 in answering the Pharisee’s inquiry by quoting from Genesis 2:24 and then he notes, “Therefore what God has joined together, do not let man separate.” (19:6)

b. “But I say to you...”

i. Jesus presents God’s intent, regardless of what the LOM tolerated (though they were setting that aside as well). And bear in mind, as we have noted throughout this study, that I believe Jesus is not only clarifying the INTENT of the LOM, but also preaching the coming Kingdom that we are part of (cf. Matthew 4:17, 23 – He was preaching, “the gospel of the Kingdom”;

and Luke 16:16, "The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it.")

ii. Jesus gave 3 considerations:

1. ***Whoever divorces his wife causes her to commit adultery.*** He becomes an accomplice to her adultery.
2. If she marries, she is guilty of adultery because in God's eyes, she is not free. She is still covenanted to the one she married.

NOTE: What Jesus said shows His regard and respect for women over what the culture of that time said. Women were often treated as second class citizens. A divorced woman back then might be in a dire situation where she could not take care of herself (work, or be supported) and thus would seek to marry another just to be provided for (whether God approved or not).

The answer Jesus gives – she is your wife and you ARE RESPONSIBLE to provide for her. He notes the man is NOT without guilt if she remarries and thereby commits adultery (unlawful relations with one other than one's spouse).

Consider

3. ***Jesus gave an exception*** to this "EXCEPT for the cause of fornication" (sexual immorality)– more in a moment.
4. ***Whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery*** – or you might say, he is living in an adulterous relationship (which means it is one that God does NOT recognize as legitimate to Him).
5. IN ALL of these we can see the seriousness of the marriage covenant where God is concerned.
6. This must have been attention getting as Jesus preached this sermon.

iii. ***Because of fornication (sexual immorality)*** - The "exception clause."

Jesus gives ONE reason for which God will recognize one divorcing (putting away) their spouse and be authorized to remarry – their spouse has committed fornication.

Why is this exception clause there? In reality, just as forbidding divorce for any cause, this shows the sacredness of the marriage covenant. You are united (joined) by God and he expects you to remain married and FAITHFUL to one another.

One guilty of fornication (adultery) has shown disregard for the marriage bond and God will not hold the innocent party accountable.

The guilty party is to remain unmarried as a consequence of his sin.

iv. NOTE: Jesus did not say, one MUST divorce their spouse if they are unfaithful, but that they can. This is important because of the sacredness of marriage.

c. CAN you see how serious it is that we take the act of marriage seriously?

Matthew 19:1-9 gives further instructions and clarification to this doctrine.

- i. Jesus notes that FROM THE BEGINNING, God intended marriage to be for life!
- ii. The only reason, Moses PERMITTED the "certificate of divorce" was because of their hardness of heart.
- iii. Jesus again repeats what God intends ***and gives another observation (a 4<sup>th</sup> one) in vs. 9***, the one who divorces his wife (for any cause other than fornication) and marries another is also committing adultery.
- iv. Note also vs. 10-12 – The disciples realized this was a hard saying and even observed it is better not to marry. But that was not the point Jesus was making! He was emphasizing that MARRIAGE IS FOR LIFE! And that's the point of our "exceeding righteousness" – take everything in your life, including your marriage, seriously! If you cannot do that, don't marry! Jesus speaks of "eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake." (vs. 12).

## II. Some observations about this subject

- a. **Culture doesn't change what God's word says.** What God says supersedes the laws of the land (what they permit).

This is a subject that calls for objective honesty. It is such an emotionally charged issue, especially when we consider that it is possible that one finds themselves in a questionable or unscriptural marriage. While we certainly cannot separate emotions from this study and relationships, we must step back and be willing to ask if God really is pleased with where I am at AND am I willing to obey Him in all things?

- b. **Marriage is intended to be for life** – one man and one woman. Romans 7:1-3, Matthew 19:6, etc.  
c. **There may be innocent parties** – not sinless or perfect, but innocent so far as this topic is concerned. This is important to understand.

And it is also important to know that neither party may be innocent. You may have one or both spouses who are failing to fulfill their responsibilities in the marriage (cf. Ephesians 5:22-33).

- d. **Divorce is a terrible thing.**- Malachi 2:16 - *And this is the second thing you do: You cover the altar of the Lord with tears, With weeping and crying; So He does not regard the offering anymore, Nor receive it with goodwill from your hands. Yet you say, "For what reason?" Because the Lord has been witness Between you and the wife of your youth, With whom you have dealt treacherously; Yet she is your companion And your wife by covenant. But did He not make them one, Having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. "Therefore take heed to your spirit, And let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. "For the Lord God of Israel says That He hates divorce, For it covers one's garment with violence," Says the Lord of hosts. Therefore take heed to your spirit, That you do not deal treacherously." (Malachi 2:13-16) (emp. mine – TT)*

We could go on continually about how terrible divorce is, and anyone who has experienced it, whether they be a party to the divorce, or a bystander (children, family, extended family, friends, etc.) knows that.

I am convinced divorce is one of the scourges to our society. It is one of the reasons, our families are falling apart and why we are seeing so much turmoil around us. When the family unit is broken, so is society.

- e. **We do harm in evangelism because we fail to respect God's law on MDR.** Surveys show the divorce rate among believers in Christ (so-called Christians) to be fairly equal to unbelievers, or just slightly better. Evangelicals emphasize the condemnation of homosexuality, abortion and other issues by appealing to scripture. But there is often a blind spot when it comes to MDR. The world sees the moral inconsistency.
- f. **We need to emphasize the sacredness of marriage both in example and teachings.** We sometimes get caught up in the debate about M-D-R and its technicalities. And while that is needed because souls are in danger, we must NEVER forget to address HOW we can prevent this wretched act – ensure that our children and congregations are understand what a godly marriage is and how it works. We need to frequently emphasize "home and family" and how to deal with troubles. We need to take our "witness" seriously, if we are present for the marriage ceremony of a husband and wife. When we see trouble, do what we can to help them work through it to keep that marriage intact. Souls may be in danger (cf. 1 Peter 3:7).

And thus we see the teaching of Jesus on this subject in the sermon on the mount. With authority He taught what God expects of each of us, in every area of our life. We will continue this study next week. But for now, is your righteousness governed by God and His word? Think about it!