

Radiant Church, January 17, 2016
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**A Disciple's Heart...Hates Divorce
Matthew 5:31-32**

We're talking about today. There is nothing harder for me as one of your pastors to deal with when people are contemplating, going through with or living with the results of divorce. It's heart breaking. It's a confusing issue, and there are a lot of questions that come up concerning divorce, most of which we will not be able to address this morning.

There are also a lot of places in Scripture that talk about marriage, divorce and remarriage that we will not be able to get to today.

At some point in the future we will do our best to write a position paper that we hope will respond to your questions and concerns.

But let's do this...

Matthew 5:31-32 *It was also said, "Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce." But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.*

Jesus is still talking about the Law (5:17-20) where he is moving people for the first time from talking about external behavior to thinking about heart issues. He's saying, "As my people you now live out those beautiful attitudes"

The evidence of a Christian is that their heart is turned toward God
But all of us have hard hearts over some things
We don't want to change our opinions over some things
Jesus is going after those hard things

The Law of Moses, and the Pharisees' interpretations looked for loopholes
Our posture as Jesus followers toward His Law is one of humble submission

He's already used the examples of anger and lust, and now talks about divorce.

Some historical context is necessary before we go further:

Deuteronomy 24:1 *When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house...*

This created a controversy. In Jesus' day the question was "what does some indecency mean?"

There were too prevailing schools of thought:

The very liberal rabbinical school of Hillel interpreted “indecent” to mean just about anything the husband didn’t like
burned the dinner
walking around with her hair down
speaking to men on the streets
even speaking negatively about her mother-in-law
One influential rabbi from this school of thought also taught that “finds no favor in his eyes” meant that a man could divorce his wife if he found a woman who was more beautiful.

Thankfully, the other prevailing school of thought taught that “indecent” meant only those kinds of sexual indecency short of adultery, since adultery was punished by immediate execution

Divorce is emotionally wrenching, more so than even the death of a spouse
It’s public, in fact it involves a new legal status
The memory of divorce never goes away
Divorce brings with it a lasting sense of failure, guilt and shame

In this next passage, the Pharisees are trying to draw Jesus into this longstanding debate and then exploit his response for their own ends.

Some were even hoping his response would get him in trouble with Herod, because a negative answer would publically align him with the reason that got John the Baptist beheaded.

Matthew 19:3-9 *And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause? He answered, Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate. They said to him, Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away? He said to them, Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.*

The Pharisees are pretty much saying, if Moses made provision for divorce, then divorce must be part of God’s ideal for his people, and therefore okay if not even encouraged

And Jesus responds by saying, “because of your hardness of heart...”

Jesus’ answer corrects the Pharisees, by saying that Moses permitted

but didn't command it as the Pharisees were trying to assert

The granting of a certificate was not to free up the man, but to protect the rights of the woman. After the divorce, the man could not marry his former wife again, so she wouldn't be treated like a ping pong ball, like chattel.

Marriage was not something anyone could walk in and out of

Our culture has made the mistake of separating divorce and remarriage as two different things. This was not the case in Jesus' day. It was assumed that divorce always resulted in remarriage - otherwise the woman and her children would have not likely survived

In the beginning, divorce was inconceivable - and impossible
By quoting Genesis 2:23-24 he emphasizes two things

First, the intimacy of the marriage relationship - two become one flesh
Deeper even than the relationship we have with our children
Marriage is the deepest human relationship

Second, Jesus emphasizes the permanence of marriage
Marriage was to be monogamous, intimate and enduring
Anything less is a departure from the divine model
Some things after the Fall were no longer possible, but regarding
marriage God's standard did not change

Marriage was designed by God for one ultimate reason - to bring glory to Himself. His glory and our joy

While marriage in our culture's eyes is a contract, in God's eyes marriage is a covenant relationship

A contract thinks about the other party's fulfilling promises
A covenant thinks about fulfilling our own promises
A covenanted marriage means we make no provision to walk away

And Marriage was designed by God to be permanent
Sexual union, one flesh, intimate, symbolic of Christ and His Church
Two people becoming one, union

Divorce is like ripping flesh apart

Marriage is in the first book of the OT, and also in the final book of the OT
Malachi 2:14-16 *But you say, Why does he not (why has he abandoned us)? Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant*

God has always called His people to relate their own marriages to their relationship with God

Okay, we now have to look at that phrase “sexual immorality”

Porneia (where we get our English word, pornography)

Applied to marriage, it means unchastity, marital unfaithfulness, etc.

And note, all of these offences were originally punished by death under the OT Law. These sins terminated marriage not by divorce but by death

By the time of the Roman occupation, getting a death sentence was difficult to obtain because only the Romans themselves did any executing, so divorce became the substitute for death

Strange as it may seem to you, and in spite of present statistics, divorce was more common in Jesus’ day than it is in our present time.

Jesus is thus being far stricter than either Rabbinical school by saying the only grounds for divorce was marital unfaithfulness, breaking the one-flesh union

In **1 Corinthians 7:15** one more reason for divorce is offered

But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace.

So, the Bible makes only two reasons for divorce, marital unfaithfulness such as adultery, and the desertion of a believer by an unbelieving spouse

What do we do? How do we as the church respond?

1. We must resist the permissiveness of our culture and take our stand against divorce or remarriage on any grounds other than those taught in God’s Word
2. We must refrain from being self-righteous judges. All of us are adulterers at heart
3. To those who have initiated or suffered divorce we must be forgiving, like our Lord. We must not call unclean what God now calls clean
4. And lastly, we should make joyful provision for the remarriage of those who have been biblically divorced

If you’ve been divorced:

Have you forgiven your ex?

Have you repented of your sins against your ex?

Have you asked for your children’s forgiveness?

Can you now accept the forgiveness God accomplished through Jesus at
The Cross?

Without God’s presence in your heart you cannot do this!

If you’re contemplating divorce as an escape to freedom:

Have you done everything to redeem, restore, save your marriage?
In your responses, would you be indefensible before God Himself?

If you are guilty of living in the same house but physically or emotionally abandoning your spouse, ask yourself: are you wanting a close relationship with Jesus while at the same time being willfully guilty of abandoning the wife (or husband) or your youth?

If you're feeling convicted by this, praise God. The Holy Spirit is doing His work.

But don't walk out feeling condemned. The Bible tells us clearly in **Romans 8:1** "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Jesus took that condemnation on Himself.

Let's finish by going to the beautiful attitudes, the Beatitudes earlier in **Matthew 5:3-10** but read these with me with ears belonging to someone already divorced, contemplating divorce, or prideful because they're not divorced:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven
Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted
Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied
Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

Know this, remember this, ponder this: God hates divorce, and He loves Christ-honoring marriages...Do you?