

PP The King and His Kingdom-The Conduct of a Disciple of Christ
Part 15-Matthew 5:31-32; 19:1-12 The Disciple's Marriage **5/27-28/2017**

A new study just completed reveals the effects of the latest presidential election on marriages. Couples feuding over President Trump, are heading to divorce court in record numbers. Millennials, married and unmarried are breaking up, 22% of them, over political differences. Non millennials are breaking up at a rate of 10%.

24% of Americans in a relationship or married report that since Trump was elected, *"they and their partner have disagreed or argued about politics more than ever."*

New York-based divorce attorney Lois Brenner said, *"In my 35 years of matrimonial practice, I have never seen so many couples split over a political disagreement as with the Trump election"*

Divorce and remarriage is an incredibly sensitive topic in which there is wide disagreement in the church.

Biblically, it is not so much a complicated matter, but a complex one, and for many, painful! And for those of us who are divorced, there is likely anxiety right now listening to this message. Feelings of guilt, shame, humiliation, bitterness usually accompany the severing of a marriage. My aim is to be clear, sensitive, practical, and of course, absolutely scripture-centered! I will give you the background this week, and answers to practical questions on divorce and remarriage next week.

Let's begin by understanding that the light of God was removed from Israel, plunging them into spiritual darkness for 400 years, and a major reason for that was widespread divorce.

PP *"Yet you cover the altar with your tears because the Lord doesn't pay attention to your offerings anymore, and you receive no blessing from Him. 'Why has God abandoned us?' you cry. I'll tell you why; it is because the Lord has seen your treachery in divorcing your wives who have been faithful to you through the years, the companions you promised to care for and keep. You were united to your wife by the Lord. In God's wise plan, when you married, the two of you became one person in His sight. And what does He want? Godly children from your union. Therefore, guard your passions! Keep faith with the wife of your youth. For the Lord, the God of Israel, says He hates divorce and cruel men. Therefore, control your passions—let there be no divorcing of your wives."* **Malachi 2:13-16 (TLB)**

God hates divorce as well as those who cruelly sever the marriage bond without just cause! He protects the vulnerable who suffer from divorce, who, biblically, were wives and children. And with that, let's begin at **Matthew 5:31**, noticing His first 4 words, ***"It was also said..."*** Jesus uses this phrase, or some variation of it, to point His audience straight to the twisted labyrinth of rules called the Oral Law of the Scribes and Pharisees.

They had taken God's Law, given through Moses, and made nearly countless interpretations which resulted in man-made rules they called traditions.

Let's notice specifically what Jesus said about this in the subject of divorce and remarriage.

"Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce." **Matthew 5:31**

In order to understand what He is about to say, we need to be sure we understand three things: What the Law originally said about divorce and remarriage; how the Rabbis interpreted it in regards to divorce and remarriage; and how Jesus clarified and restored marriage.

PP 1-The distortion of marriage and divorce by the rabbis

A great debate had been raging for years on the topic of divorce, and it centered on one word found in Deuteronomy 24:1, and here it is:

PP *“When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecent in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce...”*

The burning question was, what does it mean by *‘some indecent’*?

And the debate raged between two schools of rabbis: *Hillel and Shammai*

Those in the liberal school of Hillel interpreted *‘indecent’* in the broadest manner possible. It has been my experience in ministry, that those desperately wanting to divorce tend to broaden biblical thought on the subject, twisting it beyond what the Scripture says. Emotional pain can powerfully distort the bible’s teaching on divorce and remarriage.

The school of Hillel had terribly distorted it, and was the dominant view in 1st century Israel. They interpreted *‘indecent’* to mean she was openly naked or flirtatious, but also that she burned her husband’s dinner.

Or perhaps she went out of the house with her hair down, something only done with her husband in the bedroom.

Or that she spoke to another man on the street, or spoke unkindly about her husband’s mother.

Or if she embarrassed her husband in front of his friends.

This school went so far that one scholar, Rabbi Akiba, said indecent was also if she wasn’t as beautiful as another woman.

Truly, a man could even divorce his wife for no reason, for none was any longer required.

Marriage in Israel had fallen to the point where a wife was terribly, the property of her husband.

But there was another school of rabbinical thought, much more conservative, called Shammai. These rabbis viewed *‘indecent’* as specifically the act of adultery and the only grounds for divorce.

Neither school had it right and put differently, both had it terribly wrong.

Recall what we have been teaching you about God’s Law: He gave it to us to reveal His character and His will.

With that said, let’s look at the Deuteronomy passage and find out why Moses gave this law.

PP 2-The passage the Rabbis distorted and its clarification

Did you know that extensive studies have shown that in virtually every known human society, the institution of the family has determined both the longevity and health of that society?

PP *“The evidence shows, marital breakdown reduces the collective welfare of our children, strains our justice system, weakens civil society, and increases the size and scope of governmental power.”* Marriage and the Public Good, The Witherspoon Institute, p. 30

The question of what causes civilizations to fail is complex, but at the bottom of all researched data, is the disintegration of the family unit, of which the foundation is marriage.

When Jesus walked the earth, the family, world-wide was in crisis.

The New Testament must be viewed with two backgrounds: Greco-Roman, and Jewish.

Greek culture was slowly assimilating Israel, especially in Galilee, the site of this sermon.

To the Greeks, extra-marital relationships were not only accepted, they were expected

PP One Greek said *“We have courtesans (prostitutes) for the sake of pleasure; we have concubines for the sake of daily cohabitation; we have wives for the purpose of having children legitimately, and of having a faithful guardian for all our household affairs.”*

They demanded that women must remain morally pure, while men were given an immoral license to do anything they wanted with anyone

Rome conquered Greece militarily, and for the first 500 years of Roman commonwealth there was not a single recorded divorce

The first divorce on record was Spurius Carvilius Ruga in 234 BC, and he did so because his wife was childless and he wanted a child

But rapidly, divorce in Rome became as common as marriage, with experts saying the average Roman husband had between 15 and 20 wives over the course of his life

PP There emerged a Roman joke: *“Marriage brings only two happy days-the day when the husband first clasps his wife to his breast, and the day when he lays her in the tomb.”*

Men again had complete dominance over their wives, treating them as merely property

The Jews were not as bad as this, but divorce was still commonplace, and what had emerged in 1st century Israel, was a *divorce for any reason* practice

Deuteronomy 24 shows this was nothing new to Israel

PP *“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, and if she goes and becomes another man’s wife, and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the LORD. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.”* Deuteronomy 24:1-4

This law deals primarily with ex-husbands remarrying ex-wives, and it is not primarily a law about divorce and remarriage, though the Pharisees in Jesus’ day made it this

The situation was that the husband found an *‘indecency’* in his wife and issues her a certificate of divorce

What that is, is not defined, but it wasn’t adultery, for that was punishable by death, not divorce

Most commentators believe it means some immodesty or indecent behavior is involved

And while this at first seems like terrible, shoddy treatment by God to the wife, know this

In those days, marriages weren’t performed by pastors and divorces weren’t granted by officials

All a man had to do was merely tell his wife he was divorcing her, no reason necessary

In Muslim practice, just saying, *‘I divorce you’* three times severs a marriage

God introduced laws in Deuteronomy 24 to protect the vulnerable wife

PP And it contained 3 divine principles intended to protect the vulnerability of wives:

PP i. *God’s command narrowed divorce to only certain and specific causes*

Before he could obtain a divorce, the husband had to establish the cause described under the title of uncleanness and he had to have the bill of divorce authenticated by two witnesses

The frivolous excuses that men had been using were now severely limited and prohibited
Before this law, a man could discard his wife, turn her out of his home, and leave her unprovided
for and at the mercy of the world

This Law protected the woman by requiring she received a bill of divorcement which was a
statement that she'd been dismissed not because of unfaithfulness but for a lesser reason
It could only be handed to her in the presence of witnesses which she could call to verify
This Law made divorce formal, and allowed her the right to remarry

PP ii. *God's command allowed her to remarry*

Without this bill in hand, and she remarried, she would be accused of adultery and killed

PP iii. *God's command protected the woman from being treated as disposable property*

If he divorced her, and she legally remarried, and her new husband divorces her, she could never
be demanded back by the first husband

If he wakes up and realizes the grass was not greener, he could not go and demand her back

It impressed on Israel, the permanency of dissolving a marriage, so take great thought!

In giving Israel this law, God was not blessing divorce, but managing their hardened hearts, and
protecting their wives from a terribly heinous condition

Listen...the scribes reinterpreted '*indecency*' as being anything they dislike about their wives
Jesus is about to settle the debate and uphold the sanctity of marriage

PP 3-The Correction Jesus gave to divorce and remarriage

"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." Matthew 5:32

Jesus summarized here, His law on divorce and remarriage, and expanded it in **Matthew 19**
So we turn there, and learn precisely what led to the rabbis' misinterpretation

PP ***"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 not 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."***

Matthew 19:4-9

Their question was a trap, trying to set Jesus up with Herod, who had already killed John the Baptist (**Matthew 14**) for calling him out as an unlawful divorcee

Jesus took them back to the original statement made in Genesis 2, affirming that no one should
separate a man and a woman whom God has joined together

They asked then, why did Moses *‘command one to give a certificate of divorce...?’*
 Their misinterpretation taught that God’s will is that a man should divorce an unpleasing wife
 Unfortunately, many so called Christian counselors today will tell unhappy spouses that God
 doesn’t want them miserable, so God is fine with them divorcing

Jesus corrects: *“Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives”*

It was because the hearts of the men were hardened, refusing to honor their wives in marriage

But Moses did not ‘command’ divorce, he merely *‘allowed’* it

Nowhere in all of Scripture does God bless or command divorce

He permits it, and even then for one situation only: *“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.” 5:32*

Now, I am going to end on a cliffhanger, and pick this up next week, answering some very practical questions on divorce and remarriage: is it allowed, and if so, when?

Let me close by summarizing what we learned

Divorce has been rampant in all ages and societies and God’s people, unfortunately, have been no exception

God never blesses or commands divorce, but He will allow it in one situation: sexual immorality

God cares very much for the one divorced for frivolous reasons, and hates the cruelty of those who frivolously discard their spouse

Next week, we will look at clear and practical biblical guidance on divorce and remarriage

Let’s pray for grace for all our marriages!

Pray