

# Command #5: Marriage is Sacred, so do not Divorce

Matthew 5:31-32 // Jerry Barber & Greg Singerle

<sup>31</sup> “It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’<sup>32</sup> But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Note: Our intention at Harvest is to honor God in this area by doing three things that are different but must work together: commend marriage, condemn divorce, and show grace to divorced people.

## Condensed Version

Read Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:1-9 and discuss these questions with your disciple(s):

1. Compare these verses to Matthew 5:27-30. How are lust and divorce similar?
2. Meditate on Matthew 19:5-6 and identify some of the ingredients Jesus said were necessary for marriage.

## Study (answers follow below)

1. Compare these verses to 5:27-30. How are lust and divorce similar?
2. Matthew 5:31-32 is very brief, but Matthew elaborates on it in 19:1-9. Read that passage and make 3-5 observations.
3. Background: In the first century, marriage ties in the Greco Roman world were not very firm, and grounds for divorce became a very important issue for Jews. The Pharisees discussed not whether divorce was permitted, but on what grounds--based on the “something indecent” of Deuteronomy 24:1. In first century Jewish practice, the husband had the sole right to effect a divorce--only the husband could put away his wife, not vice versa. To do so, he gave her a certificate of divorce as outlined in Deuteronomy 24:1. However, in time this changed, and women could petition for divorce. There were two schools of thought among the Pharisees (Jewish religious leaders of the day) on the meaning of the phrase, “something indecent” in Deuteronomy 24:1: (1) The first one (Shammai) held that a man could divorce his wife for immodest behavior or lack of chastity (especially if she were guilty of sexual immorality, but other examples given included going out with her hair unbound, spinning in the streets or speaking with any man). This was the more conservative position. (2) The more liberal position was that of Hillel, who believed that a man could divorce his wife for **anything** offensive or displeasing. This school of thought focused on incompatibility of any sort, including spoiling her

husband's food; one rabbi believed this included if he found someone more beautiful to him. Based on this background, how is Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:1-9 different from that of the Pharisees?

4. When the Pharisees test Jesus in Matthew 19:3, where does he direct their attention?
5. Meditate on Matthew 19:5-6 and identify some of the ingredients Jesus said were necessary for marriage.
6. Based on Matthew 19:9 and 1 Corinthians 7:12-15, what are the two exceptions God makes concerning the permanence of marriage? (note: He permits but does not command separation in these cases)

## Answers:

1. Like lust, divorce (with some exceptions) is the moral equivalent of adultery.
2. (many answers possible here)
3. John Stott, in *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (94-95), gives at least three primary differences:
  - a. The Pharisees were preoccupied with the grounds for divorce; Jesus with the institution of marriage.
  - b. The Pharisees called Moses' provision for divorce a command; Jesus called it a concession to the hardness of human hearts.
  - c. The Pharisees regarded divorce lightly; Jesus took it so seriously that, with only one exception, he called all remarriage after divorce adultery.
4. Jesus points them back to the true intention of God in the Scriptures, God's original design for marriage as described in Genesis 2:24.
5. Priority (*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother*), commitment (*and be united to his wife*), oneness (*and they will become one flesh*), and permanence (*So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate*).
6. Sexual immorality (which breaks the marriage bond) and desertion by an unbeliever.

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## Worship

Meditate on John 14:1-3, The Betrothal of Jesus and His Bride

Although at first glance John 14:1-3 might not seem to have anything to do with marriage, understanding Jewish betrothal and marriage will show the depth of this glorious promise from Jesus (the Bridegroom) to His bride (the Church). In Jewish marriage custom, the first thing that needed to be established was the marriage covenant. The bridegroom would leave his father's house and go to the home of his bride. At this time the price that the bridegroom needed to pay for the bride was established. The bridegroom then would pay the price and the binding marriage covenant was established. At that point the bride was considered "set apart" for the groom. Although the marriage was not yet consummated, the bridegroom and bride were considered under the covenant of marriage.

Next, the bridegroom would return to his father's house without his bride and begin preparation to receive his bride. During this betrothal period where the bride was promised to the bridegroom and the bridegroom promised to the bride, the bridegroom would prepare the place where he and his bride would start and live their life together. Most often, their living accommodations would consist of a newly constructed room added to the house of the bridegroom's father. When everything was ready for his bride, the bridegroom would again leave the Father's house, go to his bride, and bring her with him to start their life together.

Sound familiar? I (Greg) hope so! Hopefully now you understand in greater context Jesus' coming, the price He paid, why He paid it, what He gets in exchange for His payment, why He said during this exchange at the Last Supper "Where I am going you cannot come," and why He will return for those who entered the covenant of marriage to Him.

### Questions:

1. Based on the Jewish custom above, where are we in the timeline of the marriage?
2. What is Jesus doing right now?
3. What was the marriage price of the bride (the Church) that Jesus had to pay?

4. How does knowing that God sees marriage as between one woman and one man and that divorce is not part of God's design make you feel?
5. Will God ever break His covenant to His bride?
6. During a betrothal period, what do you think the bride was doing?

Please note that Jesus said that in His Father's house are many rooms...I go and prepare a place for you. Apparently, God has a big house with many rooms. However, these rooms are not sufficient for you because despite all those rooms, He is preparing a place specifically for all who, by faith, trust in Christ.

#### **Answers:**

1. We are in the betrothal period, waiting for Christ to return to take His Church with Him.
2. He is preparing a place for us where we will be together with Him for all eternity. Friends, meditate on this! What wonders await us!
3. His life for ours.
4. Answers will vary but some of mine are: loved, treasured, secure, confident, esteemed.
5. No, never.
6. She was preparing and waiting anxiously for her bridegroom to come. Friends, are you living this day solely with the anticipation of Christ's coming for you?

## **Obey**

1. I (Pastor Jerry) highly recommend reading *The Marriage Builder*, by Larry Crabb. I have read many books on marriage, but this one is at or near the top of the list. In the book, he mentions
  - a. Our basis for true commitment is the goodness of God.
  - b. Our example of true commitment is the faithfulness of God.
2. If you are married, pray about your marriage, and ask your spouse what he or she thinks could strengthen it. Get ready to listen—and act!

## **Train**

#### How to help disciple others:

1. If you have children, right now you are already mentoring them in marriage, whether you realize it or not.
2. Mature couples: look for opportunities to mentor younger couples.