

3.14.21

Matthew 5:31-37

I Do or Depends? Jesus' Teaching on Marriage, Divorce & Vows

Jesus sure tackles a number of tough subjects right off the bat in His Sermon on the Mount. He has not been around very long at this point and in His teachings He begins to touch upon a number of things, behaviors that have crept into the lives of the Israelite people. God's chosen people were to be the examples of holiness to the world but they had fallen down in their duty.

So when Jesus comes along He begins teaching the un-watered down truth of the scriptures and it is bold and challenging.

There are times, places and teachings in God's word where it is uplifting, encouraging and full of forgiveness. But there are also places in God's word that are to the point about sin and the disastrous affect sin can have on you, those you love and the world around you. Jesus' sermon on the mount is one of those teachings. Full of encouragements but also full of strong statements that His disciples should turn away from sin and enjoy the blessed life of a disciple of Jesus.

Over the last couple of weeks we have looked at Jesus' teachings that shows His concern for His disciple's heart. If you deal with unhealthy, ungodly thoughts like anger and lust then you have allowed sin to creep into your heart and mind. This morning, Jesus addresses two other behaviors that can easily enter into a believer's heart, mind and then actions. Unbiblical divorce and the importance of vows.

As we begin this section, let me remind you that most of the New Testament was written for the teaching, correction and encouragement of believers. When we begin to apply biblical teaching to none believers then we have missed the mark.

A question. What do sinners or the unsaved do? They sin. Why are we surprised when enter into sin in its various forms? They don't have the leading of the Holy Spirit. They have not spent anytime with Jesus and His teachings so what they are left with is being guided by their own fleshly impulses and desires and what the world is saying is okay.

So as we go into this message about marriage, divorce and vows, we must remember this is a teaching for the disciples of Jesus. Those individuals who have surrendered their lives to Jesus and are desiring to walk in His ways.

Let me also tell you that divorce is not the unpardonable sin. Our God is full of forgiveness and restoration. He realizes that sometimes His people make mistakes and He is there to love them, forgive them and help restore them in any way He can.

There may have been a time in your life when you were not walking with the Lord as close as you are now. Maybe what led up to your divorce was your fault, maybe it was your spouses, maybe it was both of your fault. Maybe you did something that you knew not to do and that was to be unequally yoked but you thought you could change them over time.

We know that even the best Christian marriages can be challenging at times. Plus, there's Satan who loves to put pressures on marriages.

The purpose of this teaching from Jesus is not to throw stones at people who have been divorced. God loves, supports and blesses those who have been divorced. Some of the most productive and godly people in the church today are those who have been through divorce. This sermon and the teachings of Jesus is preventative in nature.

No matter where you find yourself today, know that Jesus loves you and He has only the best in mind for you so let's move forward. Newly married, remarried and everywhere in-between. Let's move forward.

Let's begin by looking at where we find ourselves as a country today.

This country had a lot of great standards and laws which it put in place when the leaders, not just the founders, but different leaders of our country put in place at different times throughout our history.

Marriage laws for example. Prior to 1969, divorce was considered to be against public interest. Promoting healthy marriages and hard to get divorces was the thinking of the nation. The court systems refused to grant a divorce except if one party to the marriage had betrayed the "innocent spouse." Thus, a spouse suing for divorce in most states had to show a "fault" such as abandonment, cruelty, incurable mental illness, or adultery. If an "innocent" husband and wife wished to separate, or if both were guilty, by law, "neither would be allowed to escape the bonds of marriage."

Our court systems and the law makers were still in tune with God's standards for marriage. I believe this encouraged couples to work on their marriages instead of bailing at the first sign of trouble or the first time their emotions got the better of them.

But things dramatically changed in 1969 when the governor of California signed into law no-fault divorce. Meaning that a spouse could dissolve a marriage for any reason or for no reason at all. After this almost all the states drafted into their laws no-fault divorce as legal.

Today, here in Colorado, you can file for divorce and in about 90 days have it finalized as long as you and your spouse agree on most things.

One of the biggest problems we have in our country today is easy, quick and cheap divorce. We live in the age of the throw-away, disposable marriages. As the title of the sermon says, its no longer I do but it depends. Depends on how I feel at the moment.

Here now, is a good time to transition into the teachings of Jesus. Let's read **Matthew 5:31-37**, "Now it was said, 'WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY IS TO GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE'; ³² but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for *the* reason of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

The first statement we must look at is "it was said." When Jesus stated it was said, He was referring to what Moses taught and then all the religious teachers since Moses taught and that was, whoever sends his wife away is to give her a certificate of divorce.

You can tell by the wording here that it was, and still is in the middle east, a male dominated society. In the days of Jesus and before, women were considered second class citizens. They were there to have children, keep the home and serve their husbands. But when Jesus came He evened the playing field by elevating women to equal status with men. Women are fellow heirs with Christ and should be treated as such.

This was not the thinking of the Israelite men. They were unrecognizable from all the rest of the world even though they were in a relationship with the one true God. They treated their women much like they treated their cattle. And if for some reason they were done with a woman, then they would write them a certificate of divorce and send them out of their home.

1. Divorce became such a problem that Jesus addressed it a couple of times

Let's look at where Jesus quotes this teaching from in the Old Testament.

Deuteronomy 24:1, “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 indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house...”

You can see how this teaching from Moses in Deuteronomy is fraught with problems. If a man finds some indecency in his wife... In other versions you will read if a man finds something unclean or indecent concerning his wife.

Over time, the church leaders who were the ones that were granting divorces, had fallen just about where we are today. No-fault divorce, meaning. If a man didn't like a way his wife dressed, cooked, spoke back to him of a plethora of other reasons, he could go write her a certificate of divorce and send her on her way.

Now let me take you to another time when Jesus was asked about divorce. **Matthew 19:3-9, “3 Some Pharisees (religious leaders) came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?” 4 And He answered and said, “Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, 5 and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? 6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no man is to separate.” 7 They said to Him, “Why, then, did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?” 8 He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. 9 And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”**

Here we see Jesus once again cut straight to the heart of the matter. He has done this over and over again. If you have hate in your heart it is like murder. If you lust over someone sexually in your mind it is adultery.

And now, it is the hardness of your heart that you were told you could divorce and if you do it for any other reason than the spouse has committed sexual immorality then matters get worse. We will get to that worse part in a minute.

Let's look at how Jesus answered the question of divorce.

When Jesus begins His answer, His answer doesn't go back to the law of Moses but He goes all the way back to the beginning pattern of creation in Genesis 1:7, "God created them male and female." Men and women are created different physically, emotionally and biologically. And one of the keys to a good marriage is to learn and appreciate the differences.

Jesus goes on to say, **"For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. In the King James Bible it says a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife."**

The leave part is not only the leaving the home but it is also the breaking away of that particular family unit and starting another. The original family unit stays in tact but the parents become more of a support system while the new family begins to discover and build their own family.

Then there's the cleaving. The use of cleave here is not like a meat cleaver it actually means to stick to like super glue. Those who are married are glued together. Some of you might think stuck together but that is okay too.

But Jesus said

2. Once a **marriage** union occurs under God, the couple is no longer two but one

This is what I think Jesus has in mind. These are two separate potatoes. Hopefully, by the time a couple has married, there has been some removal of their outer skin. God's design for marriage is for a couple to be equally yoked, that is a believer is to marry a believer. In their lives prior to being married, hopefully a couple has come to a place with the Lord where some of their outer fleshly sin nature has been removed. They have been walking with the Lord as a single person, allowing God to do this work.

So when they come together to be married, some of the work God wants to do in their lives is already done. Then in the next step the two are to become one. I think it happens this way.

Through the trials, troubles, loves, children and most importantly the work of God the two become like these potatoes. They are no longer inseparable. Their lives have become so intricately meshed together that you no longer can tell one from the other. Separation at this point is impossible. Only God can do a separating work and it is when one of the individuals has sinned in a grievous way.

Even then divorce is not God's first choice. Repentance, forgiveness and restoration is what God is all about and in the case of adultery He hopes this is what will occur. But in the case of adultery, God does make an exception.

Look back at verse 9. **9, "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."**

This is the God given exception. Now, I firmly believe that God would not have a person stay in a marriage that is physically or emotionally abusive but we need to be careful here. Physically abusive, leave, absolutely, but emotional abuse. That is one a Christian really needs to be in prayer about.

A person can chalk almost anything up to emotional abuse. I don't think emotional abuse means I don't think he loves me anymore or I don't love him anymore or he doesn't meet my needs. If all it is about is whether your needs or being met or your feelings are being hurt, I don't think God would have you divorce.

But, if the spouse is purposefully abusing you verbally, degrading you, always putting you and your kids down in destructive and demeaning way, I don't think God would have you stay in that marriage. But again, this is something that needs to be entered into very carefully, prayerfully and with much counsel. It may be that a time of separation and counseling is needed before divorce is even considered.

For us in the church of Jesus Christ, for us who got married in the church and asked God's blessing and anointing on our marriage we take our vows seriously as we know it is God who has joined us together and our marriage is sealed in heaven.

Remember this statement:

3. It isn't your love that sustains your commitment, it is your commitment that sustains your love

We made a commitment, said vows not just to our spouse but to our God and that is a big deal.

Look with me. Matthew 5:33;37, "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill our vows to the Lord. 37 But let your statement be, Yes, yes or No, no; anything beyond these is of evil.'"

Let me now take you back what Jesus says occurs when a separation of a man and woman occurs that is not biblical Let's go back to

Matthew 5:6. “...but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorces woman commits adultery.”

This is what I believe Jesus is saying. When a separation occurs between a man and a woman and it does not occur within the limitations of what God has allowed, the couple remains married in God’s eyes. So when they get with another person, still being married to their spouse, it is adultery. Whether it is the man or the woman.

Let me say again, unbiblical divorce is not the unpardonable sin. Our God is a God of forgiveness and restoration. Once we seek Him forgiveness then the past is the past and there is no looking back either by God or should be by you.

But let’s take these words for instruction about where we find ourselves today, for the future, for our children and their children. Amen?

If this is something that you have questions about, please contact me and let’s spend some time in God’s word and in prayer together, seeking God’s counsel. God has the answer for you and whatever it is, because our God is such a good God, you know it will be beyond good, it will be great.

Let’s pray