

Authentic Christians

Lesson 13 – Matthew 5:31-32

1. Review

- **Deuteronomy 24:1-4** only regulated divorce, it didn't promote it or condone it.
- **Matthew 5:31-32** says that a husband who divorces his wife for a reason other than *porneia* literally "makes her to suffer adultery."
- **Matthew 19:1-12** emphasizes the original intent of marriage, that divorce is a man-made plan to circumvent God's original design, that the divorce of a spouse for reasons other than *porneia* does not dissolve the marriage bond (that is why the remarriage is an act of adultery), and that remarriage after a divorce consummated for reasons other than *porneia* constitutes adultery.

2. One more passage: 1 Corinthians 7:10-16

- **1 Cor. 7:10-16** applies the teaching of Jesus to the marriage problems of the Corinthians: problems between believing spouses and problems brought about by a mixed marriage (the marriage between a believer and an unbeliever).
 - Prior to this passage is a discussion of the means God has provided for the prevention of fornication – because Paul is stressing the conjugal debt each spouse owes to the other, it's not unreasonable (its actually probable ...) to think that Paul IS addressing the impact of sexual infidelity on the marriages under examination.
 - The teaching of Paul finds its source in the teaching of Jesus (vs. 10) – Jesus made this point while He was in the flesh (allusion to Matt. 5:31-32, Matt. 19:1-12, Mark 10:1-12, and Lk. 16:18).

Who is Paul commanding? (the believing Corinthian husband and wife [See 1 Cor. 1:1-2] – therefore, these commands speak to believers specifically)

- Paul's reference to Jesus' teaching implies that Jesus was referring to a marriage between two believers or members of the Old Covenant (i.e. followers of Jehovah), not a "mixed marriage".
- The believing wife is commanded not to "leave" or "depart from" her believing husband (the husband is commanded the same in vs. 11).
 - a. The original word used here is different than the words for divorce used in vs. 11 and in the Gospels (*aphiēmi* [vs. 11] vs. *chōridzō* [here] vs. *apoluō* [Matthew & Mark]), but all of them are considered to be synonymous (See Matt. 19:6 & Mk. 10:9).
 - b. *Chōridzō* in this context implies and/or assumes that the desertion of a spouse or the "isolation"/deparating FROM a spouse will result in an eventual (actual) dissolution of the marriage covenant through divorce.

"Some persons have attempted to make an important distinction between ἀφίημι (aphiēmi) in 1 Cor 7.11, 13 and χωρίζω (chōridzō) in 1 Cor 7.15 on the assumption that ἀφίημι (aphiēmi) implies legal divorce, while χωρίζω (chōridzō) only relates to separation. Such a distinction, however, seems to be quite artificial." (Louw-Nida, 1:456-457)

- In keeping with the teaching of Jesus, the wife/husband who “departs from” (divorces) her/his spouse must remain unmarried
 - a. The implication of “... I command, yet not I but the Lord ...” (though not stated) is that this application is in keeping with what the Lord specifically taught.
 - b. Both the believing husband and the believing wife would presumably be considered adulterers only if they remarried, not because of the *chōridzō*.
 - c. **IMPORTANT:** Divorce between two believing spouses is not condoned but regulated by Paul – they must remain unmarried in the event divorce occurs or else be reconciled to one another.
 - d. “Hardness of heart” is not the exclusive property of unbelievers!
- “To the rest” indicates a change of audience – Paul will now apply the Lord’s teaching to the issue of a “mixed marriage”.

“Not a denial of inspiration or an indication that Paul is giving human opinion, but simply a way of saying that Jesus had not spoken on this and God had not previously given revelation on the matter, as Paul was then writing. Apparently, some Christians felt they should divorce their unsaved spouses, to live celibately or marry a believer.” (MacArthur, NASB Study Bible, 1 Cor. 7:12)

- Paul clearly states that the believing partner must not take any initiative in leaving or sending away the unbelieving spouse.
- The reason for such a “command”: the sanctification of the unbelieving spouse.

“The marriage relation, when sanctified by the Christian faith of even one spouse, has certain soteric implications; God honors and blesses the marriage institution as a channel for the conveyance of sanctifying grace.” (Murray, Divorce, pg. 65)

- “But” (vs. 15) stands in contrast to the somewhat positive nature of vv. 10-14 – the unbeliever is not compelled by the Spirit of God to follow the commands of Jesus, thus he/she may choose to sinfully abandon or terminate the marriage relationship due to “irreconcilable differences” that are the result of the believer’s expression of faith in Christ.
- **IMPORTANT:** In the case of two believing spouses, the injunction of vv. 10-11 is for them to remain unmarried or else be reconciled; in the case of a deserting unbeliever, there is no injunction to remain unmarried or even to pursue reconciliation.
- There’s no “bondage” or obligation to perform marital duties by the believing spouse IF the unbelieving spouse deserts the relationship.
- The word “bound” is the same word in vs. 39 – by contrast, if one is “not bound” in this context, then they are not obligated to perform marital duties and thus at liberty to dissolve the marriage relationship.

3. Practical & Pastoral Applications

- It's impossible to cover every possible scenario in this brief lesson ... it's important for every child of God to work through the biblical data on their own and come to their own conclusions before God.
- Marriage was meant by God to be a life-long commitment between one woman and one man
 - Gen. 2:2:24 (quoted by Jesus in Matt. 19:5 & Mark 10:6-8) provides the strict definition of marriage - one man and one woman brought together by the sovereign work of God whereby they voluntarily enter a mutual covenant that contains 1) certain responsibilities to one another, 2) divine blessings on the spouse that carries out these responsibilities, and 3) the bitter consequences for violating these responsibilities.
 - The marriage covenant was intended by God to be a life-long commitment, but because of the effects of sin on human relationships (1 John 3:4), God permitted the limited use of divorce.

“Regardless of the exact terminology in which it’s couched, the essential message of this logion (saying) is that Jesus disapproved of divorce, in contrast to Jewish law and Greco-Roman customs. Yet he recognized that it would happen at times, human nature being what it is. But divorce alone does not break the marriage bond, so remarriage ordinarily constitutes adultery. Jesus does not require divorce after the spouse has been unfaithful, as Jewish law did then. Here the excepting clause (Matt. 5:32; 19:9) limits the guilt of the divorcing husband if the wife has already fractured the marriage by committing adultery, and after such a divorce, remarriage is assumed, though some are called to celibacy (Matt. 19:11–12; 1 Cor. 7:7, 11).” (Bell, Exploring the New Testament World, pg. 286)

- Divorce may be INITIATED by a believer for ONLY one sanctioned reason: adultery on the part of the other spouse.
 - Although the OT did not provide for the dissolution of the marriage covenant because of adultery (death was the prescription for the adulterer), Jesus did through His clarification of the “uncleanness” found in Deut. 24:1-4.
 - *Porneia* was the only permitted exception given by Jesus to God’s intention for marriage: a believer MAY initiate divorce when their spouse has engaged in verifiable adulterous behavior. (see Matt. 5:32 & Matt. 19:9)
 - There’s no commandment in Scripture that requires a believer to divorce their spouse after he/she has committed adultery – it’s permitted by God without condemnation due to the ramifications of violating the “one flesh” nature of marriage.

“Although Jesus allowed divorce for adultery, He did not require it. Just the reverse: Insisting that divorce disrupts God’s plan for marriage, He opened the door to repentance, forgiveness, and healing in an unfaithful marriage, as He did in the case of other sinwrecked relationships. Reconciliation was Jesus’ way of solving marriage troubles.” (Packer, Tenney & White, Nelson’s Illustrated Manners and Customs of the Bible, pg. 440)

- A believer who has divorced or been divorced because of adultery on the part of the other spouse is free to remarry without condemnation.
- Divorce for the abandonment of the marriage covenant by an unbelieving spouse MUST BE initiated by the unbelieving spouse, NOT the believing spouse.
 - Paul did not allow the believing spouse to initiate divorce when an unbelieving spouse forsakes the marriage covenant (1 Cor. 7:15) – he did, however, free the believer from the “bondage” of the marriage relationship should the unbeliever desire release through divorce.

“It is precisely here that the sacredness of the marriage bond is attested; the very cleavage between faith and unbelief constitutes no ground for separation or dissolution. And we are reminded thereby that marriage is also a physical union – ‘the two shall be one flesh’. For that reason the lack of the deepest moral and spiritual affinity does not dissolve it, nor does the presence of the most profound spiritual incompatibility provide, of itself, any valid ground for its dissolution.” (Murray, Divorce, pg. 67)

- This “freedom” from the marriage relationship clears the believing spouse from the accusation of adultery since the marriage covenant has been dissolved; he/she is free to remarry without condemnation.
- Divorce MUST NOT be the first option used by a believer to solve marital issues.
 - Based on the weight of Scripture, a believer’s first response to marital conflict should be repentance, reconciliation and restoration.
 - Paul says that even in the case of a mixed marriage, sanctification should be pursued as long as it’s a viable option (1 Cor. 7:13-14).
 - The only biblically sanctioned reason for a professing believer to initiate a divorce from another professing believer is *porneia*; even if one’s spouse is determined to be acting like an unbeliever by the local church family, the believing spouse is not free to initiate divorce.
- Special Considerations in Application
 - Any behavior on the part of a believer’s spouse that rises to the level of public church discipline (must be a consistent pattern of sinful behavior toward another without repentance) MAY be grounds for the believing spouse to initiate separation and/or divorce.
 - a. 1 Cor. 7:10-11 seems to recognize that separation and/or divorce between believing spouses will unfortunately take place; even Murray notes in his book, Divorce: *“Paul recognizes that human nature is perverse, that even Christians act perversely and notwithstanding the wrong of separation or dismissal the parties to marriage may violate right and perpetrate wrong. It is for that evil contingency that the parenthesis provides – ‘but if she actually does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband’.* (pg. 61-62)
 - b. It’s imperative, though, that the local church leadership be asked to provide biblical counsel in such situations; in the event that a professing believer refuses (after several admonitions) to repent of a continual pattern of sin toward the other spouse or refuses to obey the clear teaching of Scripture, the local church family is obligated to take the final step in church dis-

cipline by classifying the unrepentant spouse as an unbeliever (Matt. 18:15-18).

- c. In the event of church discipline on a spouse, the believing spouse is not free to dissolve the marriage relationship, though, or even to remarry; the disciplined spouse is then “sanctified” by the believing spouse and reconciliation must begin at either evangelism or repentance.
- o No spouse (believing or unbelieving) is expected by the Scripture to maintain every aspect of the marriage covenant should one or both of them engage in activities that are threats to the physical well-being/life of the other spouse; separation and/or divorce or the pursuit of reconciliation is in order (See 1 Cor. 7:10-11 or cp. by way of illustration Lk. 21:10-24).
- o Divorced people who are believers should not be viewed as “second-class Christians” whether or not their divorce was based on biblical or selfish grounds.
 - a. Sanctification is progressive in nature – growth in biblical understanding and spiritual maturity is expected by God in this area as well (Philp. 2:13).
 - b. Divorce complicates the life of both believer and unbeliever alike; however, the believer has the added obligation to pursue godliness in the context of living as divorced person.
 - c. Biblical support and encouragement is needed for all believers as they try to “learn what is pleasing to the Lord”. (See Eph. 5:10)
- Divorce prior to salvation for unbiblical reasons does not relieve the offending spouses of culpability or responsibility/consequence because the marriage covenant was universally instituted at Creation; praise the Lord, though, that God forgives us totally from all sin (past, present, and future) through faith in Jesus Christ (See Rom. 6:10 & 1 Jn. 1:7-9)!

4. God hates divorce because it’s the act of a traitor! (Jer. 3:1-10 & Mal. 2:13-16)