

“The Permanence of Marriage”

Part Two

"And it was said, 'Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce'; but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery." (Matt. 5:31-32)

1. Why is understanding the purpose of a thing essential for judging its worth? Give examples.

Read Matthew 5:31-32 and Matthew 19:3-9

2. Review God's purposes for marriage.
 - a. God designed marriage to reflect His nature of unity in plurality.
 - What does Jesus say in Matthew 19:5-6 that communicates this design?
 - What would this unity look like in a marriage? Think in terms of goals, values, etc.
 - b. God designed marriage to reflect His character of faithfulness and lovingkindness.
 - Read Psalm 89:30-34. What does this say about God's faithfulness to His promises? What does it say about His lovingkindness?
 - Under what kind of circumstances would a marriage reflect this kind of faithfulness?
 - How is God's lovingkindness reflected in marriage?
 - c. God designed marriage to reflect the love of Christ for His bride, the church.
 - Read Ephesians 5:22-33. In what ways does Paul compare marriage to Christ and His church?
 - How does the wife's submission to her husband make the gospel visible?
 - How does a husband's sacrificial love for his wife make the gospel visible?

3. Why is it so important to think about divorce in light of God's purpose and design for marriage?
- a. Reconciliation is God's desire, and it is the heart of the gospel (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-20).
 - Why was reconciliation necessary between you and God?
 - What did God do to bring about reconciliation? What was the cost?
 - How should our understanding of these things shape our desires when things get difficult in marriage, or in any relationship for that matter?
 - b. Jesus will never initiate a divorce from His bride, the church (cf. Hebrews 13:5).
 - If marriage is designed to reflect Christ's commitment to His bride, when will it be God-honoring to initiate a divorce?
 - What is the connection between contentment and commitment (cf. Heb. 13:5)?
 - What does 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 say about the initiation of a divorce?
 - Who is the initiator in 1 Corinthians 7:15?
 - c. *Porneia*, translated unchastity or immorality, is not given as a reason to initiate a divorce but as a reason that remarriage does not constitute adultery. However, there may be cases in which the immorality of a spouse so jeopardizes the well-being of the family that divorce is necessary to protect the innocent.
 - Discuss cases in which this may be true. Why is it so important to keep the gospel foremost in our minds as we wrestle with these kinds of questions?
 - How should the gospel shape the church's response to those who have been victimized by divorce?
 - How should the gospel shape the church's response to those who have violated their marriage covenant but who have repented?

4. Whether or not remarriage is ever permissible in God's sight has been a great source of debate throughout the history of the church, so grace is strongly encouraged. The following two statements reflect the approach of Cornerstone's leadership in this area:
- a. Those who initiate divorce (except to protect the innocent) ought not to remarry.
 - In 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, what does Paul say about remarriage for those who initiate divorce?
 - What does Jesus say is the result of remarriage (cf. Matt. 5:32 and 19:9)?
 - b. Those who are abandoned must submit their hearts to Christ regarding their freedom to remarry and proceed in faith.
 - 1 Corinthians 7:15 speaks of "not being under bondage". Can you see the two ways in which this might be taken?
[This ambiguity has led to much past and ongoing debate.]
 - What does Romans 14:23 say about how we ought to make decisions when the Scriptures are not clear?
 - Why would it be sinful to proceed with a decision when there is doubt about its morality?
 - What does this say about the care a divorced person should take to study and pray about this issue before proceeding? What might make this hard to do?

Be sure to take time to reflect on the love Christ has for you as a part of His church. Mediation upon the person and work of Christ leads to a deep affection for Him that will lead to a greater desire to obey Him and a greater understanding of what obedience will look like in complicated situations.