

“The Permanence of Marriage”

Part One

"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. What do you think the average person in your peer group would say about marriage?
 - a. Would they say it is a good thing, a necessary thing, an optional thing, a social construct...?

 - b. What do you think they would say is the purpose of marriage?

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

2. Discuss the situation into which Jesus spoke these words.
 - a. In Jewish culture, only men could file for divorce, and at that time divorce was common.
 - How might these truths be indicated or implied in these texts?

 - What are similarities and differences between their culture and ours in this regard?

 - b. The religious leaders taught that God condoned divorce in some or even many circumstances.
 - How is this belief communicated by the Pharisee who questioned Jesus (cf. 19:7)?

 - How was he using Deuteronomy 24:1 to justify this belief?

 - What assumption was he making about God's command to give a certificate of divorce?

 - What assumptions do we often make when something is described or even permitted by God in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament? Why is this a mistake?

 - c. The religious leaders were having an ongoing argument about what reasons made divorce justifiable. Some believed that a man could divorce his wife if he displeased him for any reason. Others believed that a man could divorce his wife only if she had committed sexual immorality.
 - Which opinion was likely expressed by the Pharisee who questioned Jesus (cf. 19:3)?

 - How might Deuteronomy 24:1 be interpreted to justify each position?

 - How is that debate similar to our current debates within the church about divorce?

3. Discuss how Jesus chooses to answer the Pharisee and how He corrects their teachings.
- a. Jesus reminds the Pharisee of Genesis 1:27 and 2:24. Take time to read those passages.
 - Why was Jesus' question, "Have you not read..." a rebuke to this Pharisee?
 - Why do you think Jesus put these passages together? How do they fit?
 - What does the man and woman becoming "one flesh" communicate or "image forth" about God? [Remember that 1:27 was in the context of creation in God's image.]
 - b. The terms *forsake* and *cleave* in Genesis 2:24 are covenant terms. To *forsake* the parents was to turn away or break the covenant relationship. To *cleave* to the woman was to form and commit oneself to a new covenant relationship that replaced the old.
 - In what ways does covenant making and covenant keeping reflect the character of God (cf. 1 Kings 8:23)?
 - How does God treat His covenant people (Isaiah 54:10; cf. Deut. 7:9)? In what ways did God intend for marriage to reflect His character in this regard?
 - As His image bearers, in what ways does divorce distort the character of God?
 - c. The Pharisee wanted to engage Jesus in the hot question of the day, i.e. "When is it permissible to divorce?"; but Jesus does not immediately go there. Instead, He takes the Pharisee back to God's original purposes for marriage.
 - Jesus has already been dealing with issues of the heart (cf. 5:21-22 and 5:27-28). How does Jesus' response serve to expose the religious leaders' hard hearts regarding divorce?
 - When asking questions about divorce, what most concerned them? How did the questions they were asking reveal their legalistic mindset?
 - In what ways do the questions we often ask about divorce and remarriage reveal our hard-hearted desires? What about our legalistic mindsets?
 - How might an understanding and embrace of God's purposes for marriage change the questions that we ask about divorce and remarriage?
 - How might this understanding change how a single person thinks about and prepares for marriage?

- How might it change how married couples think about their marriages and how they treat one another, especially when things are hard?
- d. Discuss ways in which a strong, healthy marriage reflects the glory and beauty of Christ as He serves and loves His bride, the Church.
- In what ways will marriage give you opportunity to be Christ-like?
 - What will make this hard to live out? How can you use the means of God's grace (e.g. the Word, prayer, fellowship, etc.) to help you?
 - For what reason or reasons would Christ divorce His bride, the church? How should this shape our commitment to the marriage covenant?
 - If everyone agreed that divorce is not an option, how might this affect how struggling couple might respond to their difficulties?