

Matthew 5:31-32 – Divorce and Remarriage

Introduction

I. Matthew 5:31-32

A. Verse 31 – “It was also said...”

1. This is actually an *inference* from the Law.
2. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 – When a man takes a wife and marries her, **IF then** she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and [**consequently**] he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, **2** and **IF** she goes and becomes another man’s wife, **3** and [**IF**] the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or **IF** the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, **4 then** her former husband, who sent her away, **may not** take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the LORD. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.
3. These four verses are really _____ long commandment.
4. The *only* “command” in these verses is the prohibition against remarrying the first husband.
5. The Pharisees took the part about writing a “certificate of divorce” to mean that the man in this particular case was _____ to divorce his wife!
6. And they took the part about “indecency” to mean that indecency was always a morally _____ cause for divorce!

B. Verse 32 – But I say to you...”

II. Mark 10:2-9 (cf. Matthew 19:3-12)

And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” **3** He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” **4** They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.” **5** And Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. **6** But *from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female. 7 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, 8 and they shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. 9 What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.*”

A. The question (verse 2)

1. The “conservative” position of Shammai was that divorce was only acceptable in the case of _____ and maybe even lesser sexual sins.
2. The liberal position of Hillel said that you could divorce your wife if she spoiled your meal or even if you found someone else more attractive.
3. But both schools *agreed* that according to the Law, there were at least some cases in which divorce was certainly morally _____!

B. The counter-question and answer (verses 3-4)

1. “The essential formula in the bill of divorce is ‘Lo, thou art _____ any man’ (ESV Study Bible).
2. In the ancient world, divorce was almost *always*, and almost *universally* for the purpose of _____.
3. When the Pharisees asked about divorce, remarriage was _____.

C. The Law of allowance (verse 5)

1. In light of the nature of the Old Covenant community as an ethnic and political nation of believers and non-believers, the Law legislated some things that ultimately are not acceptable to God.
2. As *kingdom* citizens, we ask: What was the true _____ of the Law?

D. The Law of first principles (the *heart* of the Law; verses 6-7)

1. When a man and woman marry, *God* joins them together as one flesh.
 - a. The sexual relationship is the _____ of this one-flesh union, but it is not the union itself.
 - b. The union itself is something _____ creates, *not us*. And so it is something very _____.

- c. God creates the one flesh union in response to the *voluntary* covenant vows that two people take according to the norms of their culture as they enter into marriage.
- d. God creates the one flesh union in _____ marriage.

2. “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

- a. Divorce does not _____ the one-flesh union that God has created (Matthew 5:32).
 - i. The principle here is this: Divorce (the breaking up of a marriage) is contrary to the reality of the one flesh union that God has created and that continues on even after the divorce!
 - ii. “Divorce” and “one flesh union” can’t be _____.
- b. The ultimate evil of divorce is that it leads to *another* one flesh union where the marriage is an act of _____ and the marriage vows to the first spouse are *irrevocably* broken (Mat. 5; Mk. 10; Lk. 16).

III. Scriptural evidence that the ultimate evil of divorce is remarriage (the irrevocable separating of what God has joined together).

- A. Mark 10:10-12 – And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. **11** And he said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife *and marries another commits adultery* against her, **12** and if she divorces her husband *and marries another, she commits adultery.*”
Parallel account: Matthew 19:9 – And I say to you [the Pharisees]: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”
- B. Matthew 5:31-32 – It was also said, “Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.” But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, *makes her commit adultery.* And whoever *marries* a divorced woman commits *adultery.*
- C. Luke 16:18 – Everyone who divorces his wife *and marries another commits adultery,* and he who *marries a woman* divorced from her husband commits *adultery.*

IV. Can the one-flesh union that *God* creates (not man) ever be broken?

- A. The mystical one-flesh union that God creates in marriage is not broken by _____.
- B. As far as I can tell, neither is it broken by _____ (which is an act of adultery).
- C. The Bible teaches that the one-flesh union can be broken only by _____.
1. Romans 7:1-3 – Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives? **2** Thus a married woman is bound (deo) by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. **3** Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.
2. 1 Corinthians 7:39 – A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.
- D. Though the second marriage is an act of adultery, because it is a marriage, another one-flesh union is created (cf. Genesis 29:26, 28).
- E. The existence of two one-flesh unions does not mean that a person is really married to two people at the same time (polygamy or polyandry).
1. The one-flesh union is not _____ with marriage.
2. God creates the one-flesh union in the event of marriage.
3. But we know that a marriage can really and truly _____ even when the one-flesh union does not (Matthew 5:32).
4. John 4:17-18 – The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.”
5. Cf. 1 Corinthians 7:11; Deuteronomy 24:1-4
6. A divorced person is not “actually” married in *God’s sight*. The one-flesh union still exists, but the marriage does not.
- F. In the case of divorce and an adulterous remarriage, the first marriage has been irrevocably separated and a person is now obligated to fulfill their commitments to their second marriage.
1. Two wrongs (divorces and remarriages) don’t make a _____!

2. Cf. 1 Corinthians 7:1-5, 10-13
3. Cf. 2 Corinthians 6:14-15 & 1 Corinthians 7:12-13
4. Jesus said that “divorce and remarriage” (a point-in-time act) constituted adultery, not the repeated sexual act.

V. What about divorce by itself (apart from remarriage)?

- A. Divorce is certainly wrong if it _____ the other person to commit adultery (through remarriage; Mat. 5:32).

- B. 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 – To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate [divorce] from her husband **11** (but *if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband*), and the husband should not divorce his wife.

- C. 1 Corinthians 7:12-13, 15 – To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. **13** If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. **15** But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace.
 1. Paul releases the believing spouse from the obligation to _____ to the marriage when the unbeliever wants to leave.
 2. This does not mean that in the case of “abandonment”, remarriage is a legitimate option.
 - a. “Enslaved” (douloo) is never used anywhere else in the New Testament to refer to the marriage bond (no longer enslaved in/to marriage?).
 - b. Paul uses the word “bound” (deo) to refer to the marriage bond (1 Cor. 7:27, 39; Rom. 7:2).
 - c. “Enslaved” is certainly not an appropriate word to refer to the one-flesh union created by God in marriage!
 - d. Nothing in the context is conclusive enough to warrant remarriage – especially in light of the clear teaching of Jesus in the Gospels!
 - e. Jesus says that a (wrongfully) divorced woman who marries another man commits _____ (Matthew 5:32).
 - f. Jesus says that anyone who marries a divorced (lit. “sent away”/abandoned) woman commits _____ (Matthew 5:32; Luke 16:18).
 - g. Before remarriage can be acceptable (not an act of adultery), we have to conclude that the one-flesh union has been dissolved.
 - h. But Jesus has clearly and categorically stated that divorce does not dissolve the one flesh union – otherwise remarriage would not be called adultery even for the man who illegitimately divorced his wife (Luke 16:18).

Conclusion – The HEART of the matter

- A. The ultimate point here is not _____! According to Jesus, the ultimate point is the _____-_____ union that God creates at marriage and that is dissolved only by death.
- B. So the *heart* issue here is that we seek to live faithfully in light of this *principle*. (“What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”)
1. Physical separation (moving out)
 2. Legal separation
 3. Divorce
 - a. I don’t see the Scriptures teaching that divorce, *in and of itself*, is inherently and always a _____ breaking of God’s holy law.
 - b. The *heart* of the matter is that physical separation, legal separation, and divorce are *all* separations of what God has joined together.
 - c. And so they are *all unacceptable* except (I would suggest) in extreme, last-resort cases.
 4. It is *remarriage* after divorce that is the ultimate desecration of the one-flesh union because remarriage after divorce *always* constitutes an *act* of _____.
 - a. I would suggest that it’s not the divorce, but the remarriage that in and of itself is *always* an inherent _____ of God’s holy law (the 7th commandment).
 - b. (Remember that when it came to divorce, remarriage and adultery always seemed to be Jesus’ main concern.)

C. Reflection and Exhortation

To be continued...

VI. What about the “exception clause”?