

DOCTRINAL DISTINCTIVES
OF
EBMC

2.2.3 Divorce and Remarriage

INTRO: In our first message on this subject we took a speedy trip through the Old Testament. This morning we are going to begin looking at the NT and the subject of divorce and remarriage. We are going to consider first, John the Baptist, who lost his head, literally, for confronting a godless leader on his unlawful marriage.

Then we will begin considering the single greatest authority on this matter and any other matter as well, the Lord Jesus. Just before He ascended to heaven, He said, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth." I guess that's just about anywhere. It also gives Him authority on any matter you can raise question on! Certainly, we will then be at the most crucial place of all, when it comes to this matter of divorce and remarriage.

Furthermore, without any doubt whatsoever, the Lord Jesus is the most authoritative figure on interpreting the OT you will find anywhere. And it is in the teachings of this greatest of all rabbis that God's view of divorce and remarriage is comes into sharpest focus! Have you ever wondered what Jesus would say to Deuteronomy 24:1-4? Well, you need wonder no longer because whenever He deals with this subject, that passage receives some treatment.

So, let us begin our look at this subject in the NT.

II. THE NEW TESTAMENT AND DIVORCE

A. John the Baptist

(Read Matt. 14:1-12.) Now John the Baptist confronted Herod about his wife Herodias. And John the Baptist said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have her." Now I can tell you this: if you value your head, don't talk to people about their unlawful marriage! That it is an explosive subject. Yet there are times when it should be done, and whether it costs you or not is not a reason to refrain from doing so, as we learn from John the Baptist.

Now it is not spelled out in the text what John had in view when he said it is not lawful for you to have her. But I find Herod's marriage to Herodius unlawful on three counts. First, he had married his brother's wife. This was unlawful according to Leviticus 18:16. Now a man was not to marry his brother's wife unless the brother had died, and providing he had no children. If that was the case, then it became obligatory for a brother to raise up children for his brother. But Herodias' husband was alive, and he had children by her for the woman that performed the dance in our text is Herodias' daughter by Herod's brother.

John Gill gives this information on the relationships involved: "This Herodias was the daughter of Aristobulus, son to Herod the Great, and brother to Philip, and to this Herod; so that she was niece to them both; and first married the one, and then the other, whilst the former was living. Philip and this Herod were both sons of Herod the Great, but not by the same woman; Philip was born of Cleopatra of Jerusalem, and Herod Antipas of Malthace, a Samaritan; so that Philip was his brother by his father's side, but not by his mother's; the Evangelist Mark adds, "for he had married her": the case was this, Herod being sent for to Rome, called at his brother Philip's by the way, where he fell into an amorous intrigue with his wife, and agreed, upon his return, to take her with him and marry her; as he accordingly did, and divorced his own wife, who was daughter of Aretas, king of Arabia Petraea; which occasioned a war between Herod and his wife's father, in which the former was beaten."

The second reason John might have said Herod's marriage to Herodius was unlawful was because it was incestuous. She was his niece! The third reason it was an unlawful marriage is because Herodius and Herod were both divorced and Herodius' husband was still alive. Now that John approached Herod for this reason is, of course, argued by some, because it would seem to fly in the face of the modern view of most. However, Eusebius, one of the early church fathers, in his writings seems to agree with this view, since he states that Herod married Herodius while his brother Philip was still alive.

John Gill seems to agree with this in his commentary and gives this account from another Jewish writer whom he does not name: "Herod Antipater was a very wicked and pernicious man, many of the wise men of Israel he slew with the sword; and he took to wife, his brother Philip's wife, whilst he was living..." If divorce is among the reasons John confronted Herod, then John held to a 'no-divorce' position.

Now in this quote, as in Eusebius' writings, the sin that is pointed out is that Herod had married Philip's wife, "whilst he was living." That points to the wrong of marrying a divorced woman while her original husband was living. If this is correct, then it makes the sin John pointed out, the 'unlawfulness' as having married a divorced woman whose husband was still alive.

Now let me quickly add that this is debated by many, because it does such harm to any view that allows for any kind of divorce and remarriage. However, I think what can be argued in favor of this view is that the Lord Jesus and the Apostle Paul agree that divorce and remarriage is a sin of the greatest magnitude, a sin that will exclude such people from heaven.

So, we turn now to the view of Jesus on this subject.

B. Jesus

1. Matthew 5:32

We do not go far into the ministry of Christ and we come to the very subject we are on. Now no doubt that Jesus' interpretation of the OT and His words on the subject are the most weighty of all. We meet this subject early in the ministry of Christ for it is found in His first major discourse in Matthew 5. Now Matthew 5 is in one of the large discourses found in the book of Matthew, called the Sermon on the Mount.

So let us consider the context in which our topic is found. We are introduced to this discourse in Matthew 5:1-2 (read). Then in 5:17-20 we have a section introduced that will deal with many OT

concepts (read). Now notice the things Jesus deals with (read 21-22a; 27-28a; 33-34a; 38-39a; 43-44a). The verses we are interested in are 31-32 (read). We have here six sections that begin like this, "You have heard this, BUT I say this."

Now in each of these six sections Jesus corrects or raises the concept they had to a higher level. In verse 21 He deals with the old concept of how bad murder is. But Jesus says that anger without just cause puts one in as great a danger as their view of murder did. In verse 27 He deals with the old concept adultery. But in verse 28 He says that a lustful look is adultery in the heart.

Then in verse 31 He deals with divorce and the old concept is this: "Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce." Now we can expect that the words "But I say to you..." will introduce us to a standard above what had been said in old time. So here it is: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced is committing adultery.

Now Jesus is dealing with the Jew's view of Deuteronomy 24, the most discussed passage in the OT on divorce. He has totally wiped out their view and raised the standard so high, that it will later cause His disciples to say, "If the case of a man with his wife is like that, then it is better not to marry!" So we go to that passage.

2. Matthew 19:9

Let us begin by reading Matthew 19:1-12. Matthew says it was the Pharisees who came to question Jesus with regard to divorce and remarriage. They said, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?" Their question is with regard to Deuteronomy 24:1-4. What they are doing actually, is asking them who of two very famous rabbis, Hillel or Shammai, is right on this subject. Hillel was the liberal who allowed divorce for any little reason and Shammai said it

had to be a major issue. And the Pharisees are trying to trap Jesus by pitting Him against either of these two rabbis.

Jesus, in my words says, "Let me take you to the most crucial passage on this subject and thus answer your question" (read 4-6). There is His answer, short and precise, and it is this: There is no divorce permissible as long as either partner is alive. We saw this in the Genesis passage last message.

Now Jesus has the Pharisees sputtering. "What, no divorce at all?" That is the sum of their response which comes in these words, "Why then did Moses give command to give a certificate of divorce, and put her away?" What they are saying is, "You say no divorce is permissible? What about Deuteronomy 24 and Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce?"

Now notice Jesus' answer most closely. He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to put away your wives..." Divorce was permitted because of hardness of heart. Does that make divorce sound like an acceptable Christian practice? But notice also that the Pharisees said 'Moses commanded', but Jesus said Moses permitted. That is a huge difference. And notice further why Moses permitted divorce. It was because of their hardness of heart. Does that sound like a godly principle? But notice even more closely the disjunctive 'but'. Moses permitted 'but'. So we go on, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives BUT from the beginning it was not so." Where does Jesus go for the authoritative instruction on this subject? To the passage we called in our last message the most important passage.

Then Jesus Goes on like this: "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except it be for fornication (KJV), and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery." Now if it were not for these words, 'except it be for fornication' this verse could well do away with all our present day

divorce allowance. But this exception has been interpreted in such a way as to allow for divorce and remarriage in certain cases. So we must deal with that first.

The key word that must be considered is the word translated 'fornication' in the KJV. In the Greek, it is the word *pornea*. In most, if not all modern versions, this word has been translated 'sexual immorality' 'unfaithfulness' etc... All amount to about the same meaning.

Now I want to make, what I view as a very important point. As translated in almost, if not all modern versions, the word is translated as a broad term, covering all kinds of physical immorality. For example, the phrase 'sexual immorality' is a broad term covering all kinds of such immorality. Adultery would be fornication, homosexuality etc... would all be fornication. William Hendriksen says in his commentary, "The term *pornea*, ('fornication') is very broad in meaning."

When I teach this in class I say, "What is wrong with this list? Last summer we planted corn, peas, potatoes, vegetables, lettuce, and beans." What is wrong is that I listed a broad term among a list of narrow ones. If I put vegetables, a broad term, in that list, I could leave all the rest out. They were all vegetables.

According to almost, if not all modern translators, this word is translated as a broad term in at least Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. But now go to 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (read). Now the NKJV has translated *pornea* as 'fornicators' in this verse but as 'sexual immorality' in the Matthew verses. Why the inconsistency? Because, if it is a broad term in 1 Corinthians 6, you do not need some of the other words (read verse 9). If *pornea* is a broad term, then adulterers, homosexuals, and sodomites must be left out because they are then covered by the broad term. This same thing holds true in Galatians 5:19-21.

So, our question then is this: If Jesus uses *porneia* in a narrow sense, what does it then mean? Well, it means sexual immorality on the part of unmarried persons. So, fornication is immorality on the part of single people, adultery is the same sin on the part of married persons. Now the natural question is this: are the persons spoken of in Matthew 5:32 or 19:9 single people or married? We believe, as we spelled out in our statement, that this addresses those people who in the Jewish system were betrothed. When a Jewish man or woman became betrothed, they were classed as husband and wife, but they were not officially married so that they lived together as husband and wife. A classic example of this is given in Matthew 1:18-19 (read).

Now the book of Matthew, and I think no scholars will argue, was written especially with the Jews in mind. That is why Matthew includes this exception clause, but Mark and Luke, written to Gentile audiences, do not give the exception clause.

So what is Jesus saying in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9, only if a partner is found unfaithful during the betrothal period, or before actual marriage, may one divorce his or her partner. Joseph was minded to put Mary away privately, that is divorce. So back to Matthew 19 in verse 9 Jesus is once again stressing the no divorce principle. Whoever divorces his wife, unless it is before actual marriage, commits adultery.

Now notice closely that He follows this up with these words, "...and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery." In these words, the exception clause is missing. Anyone who marries a divorced person is committing, present tense, adultery. What does that mean? It means that Jesus held to a 'no-divorce' view. There is no view that can differ from that of the Lord Jesus and still be right.

Now I want us to notice one more strong indicator that Jesus viewed marriage as for life, not ideally, but really. In verse 10, the disciples

said, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." Now consider the significance of their statement. If Jesus had said, "Yes, you are right, you can divorce for any reason. Hillel was right, so go ahead and find another wife", would the disciples have responded like this? The answer of course is "No!". But if Jesus had said, "No, you may not divorce for just any reason, but if one or the other is unfaithful, then you may divorce", would the disciples have responded like this? Answer, "No". They would have said, "Aha, just as we thought, Rabbi Shammai was right." But from their response, I think we must conclude that Jesus is saying, "No, you may not divorce for just any reason. As a matter of fact, you may not divorce at all!" Only if that was what Jesus taught here can we account for the disciples response, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry."

So how can we conclude about Jesus' view on divorce and remarriage other than to say He, the Creator of man and woman, author of the Word of God said, "No divorce!"

CONCL: So, let me conclude this message. When we come to the NT, we meet John the Baptist. Now scholars are not agreed what issue it is that made Herod's marriage to Herodias unlawful, but I think it was unlawful on several accounts. First, he had married a woman who was married to another man who was still alive. That is the primary sin. But he had also entered an incestuous relationship, and he had married his brother's wife. All of these made his marriage unlawful.

John the Baptist lost his head, literally, for reprovng this very wicked man for his very wicked ways. In my experience in life, one of the most explosive matters you can touch, is somebody else's unlawful marriage!

When we come to the teaching of the Creator of the universe, the Lord Jesus, He was emphatic that the position of the Word of God is "No divorce!" When they asked Him about divorce, He went to Genesis 2 and said marriage is for life. That means no divorce. When they questioned Him on Deuteronomy 24, He insisted on going back to Genesis 2.

And when the disciples understood His teaching they were dumb-struck and said, "In that case, a person should not get married. There is no way out!"

When I counsel young people, I tell them that if this is the case of a man with his wife, now marriage is safe! If there is even one exception that allows for divorce, it makes marriage unsafe. I tell young people, only if that is the case is it safe to marry!