

Real Christianity: The Sermon on the Mount

#14: The Sanctity of Marriage & the Possibility of Divorce

Matthew 5:31-32

It is estimated that 50% of marriages end in divorce. 60% of people say they have lived with a partner outside of marriage. 70% of Americans claim it is acceptable for couples to live together without being married. 25 years ago, about 25% of Americans believed same sex marriages were acceptable. Today, about 70% of Americans believe that.

Jesus confronted the topic head on in His first recorded sermon. He said:

"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. (Matt 5:31-32 NIV)

Right away we see Christ's desire to denounce easy divorces and uphold the sanctity of marriage.

Marriage is a sacred bond, but it can be broken.

A) The sanctity of marriage

Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"⁴ "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,'⁵ and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."⁷ "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?"⁸ Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning."⁹ **I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." (Matt 19:3-9 NIV)**

What that joining and melting together entails is a mystery. It is an emotional, mental, and spiritual joining. How and when does it happen? When two people are joined in physical union. That is when the miracle of melting two people together happens. Biblically speaking, it is not a marriage certificate or a ceremony that makes you married in God's site. It is sex.

God created sex to be like super-gluing two pieces of wood together. When you tear apart two pieces of wood like that, it does not break where they are joined. The pieces of wood themselves break apart, and the joint remains fixed. You really cannot break all the bonds that occur in the act of sex. When you pull it apart, the people are broken, not the bond.

God's view of marriage was made clear in the OT. Through the Prophet Malachi, God said this:

You cry out, "Why doesn't the LORD accept my worship?" I'll tell you why! Because the LORD witnessed the vows you and your wife made when you were young. But you have been unfaithful to her, though she remained your faithful partner, the wife of your marriage vows.¹⁵ Didn't the LORD make you one with your wife? In body and spirit you are his. And what does he want? Godly children from your union. So guard your heart; remain loyal to the wife of your youth.¹⁶ "For I hate divorce!"

says the LORD, the God of Israel. "To divorce your wife is to overwhelm her with cruelty," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies. "So guard your heart; do not be unfaithful to your wife." (Malachi 2:14-16 NLT) God hates divorce. Because it is cruel. It is painful.

B) The possibility of divorce

So what are the four biblical reasons a Christian can be divorced and not sin?

1) The death of your spouse

(1 Cor 7:39 NIV) **A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.**

2) Your spouse is sexually immoral

"I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. (Matt 5:32).

3) Your non-Christian spouse abandons you

(1 Cor 7:12-13, 15) **If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him [peacefully, respectfully, then] he must not divorce her. [It's not enough that the unbeliever is merely willing to live physically with the Christian spouse. They need to live peacefully and respectfully] ¹³ And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her [peacefully, respectfully, then], she must not divorce him. But if the unbeliever leaves [or refuses to live peacefully and respectfully with the Christian spouse], let it be so. The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.**

4) Your non-Christian spouse abuses you

"God has called us [Christians] to live in peace."

God wants non-Christians to understand that it is a privilege for them to be married to one of His sons or daughters.

Discussion ?'s

- 1) What is the effect in our culture of a diminished view of marriage?
- 2) What spiritually happens in marriage? When does this happen?
- 3) How does sexual immorality hurt us? How can we be healed of that?
- 4) What is the underlying reason God has allowed divorce? How is that experienced in each of the four biblical reasons for divorce?
- 5) What was especially meaningful to you about the message?