

“Kingdom 101 ~ Interpretation vs. Reality” [6.07.09]

Today we continue to unpack Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. His conversation today has pushed cultural hot-buttons for literally centuries. The topic of divorce touches many of us @ a deep-painful level. It’s a controversial & complex subject that I am cautious not to handle disrespectfully.

I fully recognize...

- There is almost NO unhappiness so painful as the unhappiness of an unhappy marriage.
- There is almost NO tragedy so great as the disintegration of a marriage that God intended originally to be a relationship filled with love & mutual respect that crumbles into a non-relationship filled with bitterness & mutual apathy.

Divorce creates multiple causalities in its destructive path and no one is left unaffected by its painful aftermath.

It’s one of the reasons Jesus said, “Don’t divorce,” because He hates to see the people He loves go through so much misery.

Today I’m convinced like never before, that Jesus’ teaching on divorce & every subject is good - - intrinsically good - - good for individuals & society.

It’s because of this growing conviction that I choose to tackle this subject head-on with this reassurance: I will speak where Scripture speaks & I will be silent where Scripture is silent.

Let’s begin by allowing Jesus to speak for Himself, His words are life-giving!

I. Teaching about DIVORCE

A. (R) Matthew 5: 31 – 32 or p. 736 in pew Bible

1. These 2 verses can hardly be thought to represent the sum total of Jesus’ instruction on the mountain about DIVORCE.
2. These 2 verses are actually an abbreviated summary of His teaching which He goes into a deeper explanation in Matthew 19.
3. I believe it is prudent to take the 2 passages together & interpret the shorter teaching in the light of the longer teaching.

B. (R) Matthew 19: 3

1. The great tragedy in Jesus’ day with marriage in the Jewish culture was the ease with which so many men divorced their wives.
2. This is simply Dumb-Founding;
  - a. How this could happen in a culture so deliberately based on the Bible & its standards?
  - b. Or among a people known for being so centered on the family?
  - c. The answer is the same as last week = the ‘perversion of the heart’.

The quality of their goodness (quality of their hearts) had basically been neglected; they had settled for just going thru religious motions [no inward changes] ☹

Notice the Pharisee’s question...

C. re(R) Matthew 19: 3b

1. The Pharisees' had distorted God's intended purpose for marriage.
  - a. They had become legalistic about the 'certificate of divorce;'
  - b. But excessively liberal about what the husband was allowed to find displeasing or indecent in his wife.
2. We know that a current controversy about divorce was being conducted between the rival rabbinic schools of HILLEL & SHAMMAI.
  - a. Rabbi SHAMMAI was a conservative, took a rigorist line & taught that the sole ground for divorce was adultery or sexual impurity in the woman.
  - b. Rabbi HILLEL was a liberal & he broadened the woman's offense beyond the scripture to include trivial matters as: spoiling dinners; being troublesome or given to quarrels; or speaking disrespectfully of her husband's parents.
3. Guess which rabbinic school of thought was most popular? Given the basic nature of the human heart, it's easy to see which interpretation prevailed.
  - a. Institution of Marriage became fragile & began disintegrating!
  - b. One reason = God's intended purpose was abandoned!

D. Culturally, divorce is @ epidemic proportions in the U.S.

1. Every 10 to 13 seconds a mom & dad get divorced ☹
2. Tough reality - 156 couples will call it quits, end their marriage in divorce, before the time this sermon is over. Every minute of every day in every week; families are being torn apart & broken by divorce.
3. George Barna reports a deadening pattern in American culture. "There no longer seems to be much stigma attached to divorce; it is now seen as an unavoidable rite of passage."
  - a. Young people are moving toward embracing the idea of 'serial marriage,' in which a person gets married 2 or 3 times, seeking a different partner for each phase of their adult life. ☹
  - b. According to the latest data = the intersection between 'faith & culture' does not have much influence upon the choices people are making in regards to sustaining a life time covenant with 1 spouse.

Notice Jesus' reply to the Pharisee's question has (3) distinct parts:

II. God's original intentions for Marriage

A. 1<sup>st</sup> distinction = (R) Matthew 19: 4 – 6

1. Notice the Pharisees were preoccupied with the grounds of divorce, but Jesus was focused only with the sacred institution of marriage.
  - a. The religious teachers pressed Jesus on His interpretation of legitimate grounds for divorce; trying to trap Him.
  - b. I love JESUS' reply = He declined to answer their question & instead referred them back to Scripture.

2. Jesus says, GOD defines marriage in 2 different ways from Genesis:
  - a. 1<sup>st</sup> as exclusive = between a man & woman
  - b. 2<sup>nd</sup> as permanent = ‘...joined to his wife’
  - c. “...let no one split apart” = literally this means “no divorce”

Thus marriage, according to Jesus is a “divine institution” designed by God to be indissoluble! The marriage bond is more than a human contract; it is a DIVINE YOKE!

B. 2<sup>nd</sup> distinction = (R) Matthew 19: 7 – 8

1. The religious teachers called Moses’ exception for divorce a command & Jesus called it a concession.
  - i. The religious leaders argued that God had made a provision in the O.T. law for men & women to break their covenants of marriage & Jesus corrected this empty logic:
  - ii. Jesus let them know that this instruction was not a ‘divine command’ but only a ‘divine concession’ because of human weakness.
  - iii. He reminded them again to the original purpose God had created the institution of marriage; to be exclusive & permanent.

C. 3<sup>rd</sup> distinction = (R) Matthew 19: 9

1. The Pharisees regarded divorce lightly; Jesus took it so seriously that with only 1 exception, He called all remarriage after divorce, adultery.
2. Since God instituted marriage as an exclusive & permanent union; a union which He makes & man must not break.
  - a. For the person who may have secured a divorce in the eyes of human law is still in the eyes of God married to his or her partner 1<sup>st</sup> partner.
  - b. Only one exception is made by Jesus - marital unfaithfulness
3. 2 pieces of GOOD NEWS
  - a. 1<sup>st</sup> = Once a 2<sup>nd</sup> marriage has occurred, it would be further sin to break it up; for it would be destroying another marriage.
    - i. The 2<sup>nd</sup> marriage should not be thought of as continually living in adultery, for the man & woman are married to each other, not anyone else.
    - ii. The responsibility of the husband and wife in such a case is to ask God for His forgiveness for previous sin and then to ask His blessing upon their 2<sup>nd</sup> marriage.
  - b. 2<sup>nd</sup> = The word translated ‘unfaithfulness’ is porneia, which implies a sexually immoral life-style.
    - i. This does not include a confessed & repented act of adultery.
    - ii. Those who discover that their partner has been unfaithful should 1<sup>st</sup> make every effort to Forgive, Reconcile, & Restore their broken trust-relationship.
    - iii. Jesus says, “It’s not an automatic death penalty”!

I know the world is not going to accept this teaching = they scoff @ this.

In addition, the nominal Christian among us is not going to accept this teaching either, thinking it's too strict.

If you are an authentic Christ-follower [disciple] and you really want to make Jesus the Lord of your entire life, You are to accept Jesus' teaching = b/c we are to be distinctive!

This is a prickly topic that raises some difficult questions in which Christ-followers disagree on the answers. Here are a few questions I will attempt to answer biblically:

### III. Questions on divorce

- A. If adultery is the cause of the divorce is the innocent party free to remarry? YES, Jesus would not have given the 1 exception if not.
- B. What if there was a divorce & then the ex-partner dies?
  - 1. I Corinthians 7: 39 instruct, "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. [INSERT] Billy Graham story ☺
- C. What if the divorce occurred prior to becoming a Christian?
  - 1. Considerable disagreement on this question.
  - 2. I strongly believe that if the divorce occurred prior to coming to Christ there is a freedom to remarry.
  - 3. Bible says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, this person is a new creation, the old is gone, the new has come!" [II Corinthians 5: 17]
- D. The most important question is this: If I divorced & remarried against God's instructions can I be forgiven? YES
  - 1. There is no sin that God cannot forgive.
  - 2. The Bible says, "...that the blood of Jesus Christ, cleanses us of all sin" [I John 1: 9]
  - 3. Woman @ the well had been DIVORCED 5 times, but Jesus treated her with respect, forgave her, & welcomed her testimony.

#### Final ADMONITION:

What concerns me is not those who have been divorced & have sought God's forgiveness, but those who are married, who call themselves Christians, but think they can exploit God's grace.

They say, "I know God says don't divorce, but God wants me to be happy. He will forgive me, that's God's job, He understands."

That's not what the Bible says, "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left." [Hebrews 10: 26]

God created marriage to last for a life-time = divine yoke.

You are in an eternal battle for your soul & the souls of your family. The Lord didn't call you & me to be happy = He called us to be obedient!

Stick it out! In the end you will be blessed & thankful that you did!

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