

Two weeks ago we looked at Jesus' teaching regarding the seventh commandment: "Do not commit adultery." One of the things we pointed out was that the first of Jesus' antitheses dealt with the sanctity of life while this second antithesis dealt with the sanctity of marriage. Today's passage is a continuation of that teaching.

Over the years, the church's position on divorce has been relatively consistent. However, its treatment of the subject has varied. At one time, divorce was railed against and viewed by many as an almost unpardonable sin. More recently, the church's stance has softened to the extent that it is rarely discussed. I don't believe it is a coincidence that since this softened stance the divorce rate among the churched has risen to match that of the unchurched.

These two approaches reflect a common problem within the church; that is, going to extremes, neither of which is correct. Overly harsh treatment of divorced individuals has led to a rise in the number of people who seek to cohabitate rather than enter into the covenant of marriage. Remaining quiet on the subject has led to a much too cavalier attitude toward marriage.

As always, we must follow the example of Jesus not social pressures and cultural shifts.. Clearly, a thorough examination of Jesus' teaching and his interaction with people like the woman at the well in Samaria, found in John 4, reveals that Jesus did not condemn or deem as unredeemable people who had been divorced. However, Jesus also did not water down God's desire for marriage nor did he avoid the issue in an effort to not offend those who had been divorced.

With that in mind, let us use our time together this morning to examine, appreciate, and apply Jesus' teaching on the subject of marriage and divorce.

Scripture: Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-12

I. Dealing with Divorce

A. Examining the Context

1. The text
 - a) Deut. 24:1
 - (1) This passage does not prohibit divorce or remarriage but remarriage of divorced individuals after an intervening marriage
 - (2) "anything indecent"
2. Two schools
 - a) Shammai
 - (1) Focused on "indecent"
 - b) Hillel
 - (1) Focused on "anything" (19:3)
3. Tragic misunderstanding
 - a) This provision had been taken as permission

B. Explaining God's Desire (19:4-6)

1. Reference to Creation
 - a) Created woman for man
 - (1) Not a matter of subservience but of support
 - (2) Unconditional love, loyalty, sacrifice, respect
2. Reference to Marriage
 - a) Crafted marriage
 - (1) Between a man and a woman
 - (2) God officiated and blessed
3. Reverence of Marriage
 - a) Covenant between a man, a woman, and God
 - (1) Man should not undo what God has done
 - (a) Divorce
 - (b) Cohabitation
 - (c) Homosexual union

C. Exceptions Regarding Divorce

1. Calloused Heart of Man (19:8)
 - a) Man's sinfulness has led and will lead to undoing God's desire for marriage
2. Certificate
 - a) God's way of providing for the divorced woman
3. Cause
 - a) Sexual immorality breaks the covenant
 - (1) Certificate provides legal release

4. Christian (1 Cor. 7:15)
 - a) An unbelieving spouse rejects a believing spouse

D. Enacting Jesus' Approach

1. Appreciate Marriage
 - a) A gift from God - to be treasured
 - b) A covenant with God - to be honored
 - c) Do not rush into marriage - take your time (pray)
 - d) Don't confuse lust for love - take sex and physical attraction out of the picture
 - e) Two wrongs don't make a right - don't seek to escape sinful behavior and compound your sin
2. Apply God's Word
 - a) Don't be "unequally yoked" (2 Cor. 6:14)
 - b) Husbands love your wives as Christ loves the Church
 - c) Wives honor and respect your husbands
 - d) Work together as parents
 - e) Leave and cleave - loyalty and allegiance
3. Imitate Christ's Example
 - a) The church is the bride of Christ
 - (1) Regardless of the faults and failings of the church, Jesus remains faithful

Even though my father married Sherri and me, he had another pastor do our premarital counseling. However, before he sent us to that pastor he asked us one question: "If and when things don't go well, is divorce an option?" After we told him "No," he went on to explain that if divorce is considered a possible solution before you go into marriage it will become the most acceptable and easiest solution when tough times come. And everyone here who is married knows that tough times will come.

Sherri and I were blessed to have parents who taught us how to have a healthy marriage. We learned from them that healthy doesn't always mean happy. Disagreements and disappointments will arise. But a marriage that desires to honor God's design, one that is centered on Christ's example, and one that practices biblical precepts can and will survive.

Will you commit to honoring God with your marriage? Will you dedicate yourself to applying his Word to your life as husband and wife?