

THE CHRISTIAN SALT AND LIGHT COMPANY - Studies In The Sermon On The Mount

Part seven Teaching #1765 - Sunday, November 30th, 2014, 6:00 p.m.

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MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, SAME-SEX MARRIAGE, AND THE PEOPLE OF GOD - Matthew 5:31-32, 19:1-9

Matthew 5:31-32, 19:1-9 - "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' [32] 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.....19:1....Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. [2] And large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. [3] And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" [4] He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, [5] and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh'? [6] So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." [7] They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?" [8] He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. [9] And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."

Whenever you encounter a difficult or controversial passage of scripture the *pattern for approaching it* is always the same. **Start with the basic, big, clear statements.** Put what is most strongly stated first. That will give you a framework for filling in the details that may be less obvious or certain.

- 1) **NOTICE THE FLOW OF THOUGHT IN JESUS' SERMON** - It's not accidental that these verses on divorce follow right on the heels of the passage on *lust and adultery in the heart (5:27-30)*. Marital unfaithfulness doesn't happen in a moral vacuum. We always find more sweetly flavored reasons for infidelity. Jesus goes back to the law of sowing and reaping. Notice that the concern of Jesus is to **keep married people together**. He was not interested in the theological hairsplitting of the Pharisees. He wanted to strengthen marriages.
- 2) **THE PATTERN FOR MARRIAGE IS FOUND IN THE CREATION OF MAN AND WOMAN** - This is made especially clear in Jesus' expanded treatment of this subject in **Matthew 19:4-6** - "He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, [5] and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh'? [6] So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

There are **three** foundational truths that God places under every marriage ceremony: First, **marriage is to be heterosexual**. There is a foundational **male/femaleness** to marriage. Man can make homosexual marriage **legal**. But he can never make it **acceptable** in God's eyes. Second, **marriage is to be absolutely exclusive** -19:5 - "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh?" And third, **marriage is to be permanent** - 19:6 - "So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

Jesus saw the creation account (see why we must never allow it to be less than a literal account of truth?) to teach basic principles of marriage. While He recognized that marriage wasn't for everybody (19:11-12) He still saw the ground rules laid down for all marriages in creation.

"If God had supremely intended solitary life, He would have created humans one by one. If God had intended polygamous life, He would have created one man and several women. If God had intended homosexual life, He would have made two men or two women. But that God intended monogamous heterosexual life was shown by His creation of one man and one woman."

- Frederick Dale Bruner

- 3) **WHAT CAUSES DIVORCE AND DOES GOD RECOGNIZE IT WHEN IT TAKES PLACE?** - Matthew 19:7-8 - "They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?" [8] He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so."

Because God never **intended** divorce it has become a tricky subject for the church to handle. The Pharisees had questions about what Moses had allowed in **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 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 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."

Jesus makes it clear that such treatment of a marriage partner comes from a sinful heart. But at least Moses' permission of a **certificate of divorce** protected a woman from the first husband sending her away, taking her back, only to send her way again later on.

The certificate showed the finality of any divorce action. Marriage was too precious to be open to the changing whims of an unhappy husband. **God never commanded divorce. He permitted it to protect people (especially women in Bible days) from the schemes of sinful hearts.** See **Matthew 19:8** - "He [Jesus] said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so."

- 4) **THE "EXCEPTION CLAUSE"** - Matthew 5:32, 19:9 - "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....19:9.... And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."

These words must be heard within the framework of the words in 5:20 - "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." In Christ, there is glorious hope for a new heart, a renewed attitude and compassion. The whole thrust of the sermon is that those who walk in the life of Jesus can actually experience, in measure, the life of the kingdom now. This includes their marriage relationships.

Just as the sermon makes unbelievable demands (based on unbelievable provisions and helps) in the face of **loving enemies, blessing those who persecute us, turning the cheek to the one who strikes us, etc**, it also **heightens the commitment of those who would walk with Jesus in a trying marriage situation.**

The one tool the Christian has in his or her difficult marriage - even in the face of unfaithfulness - is the knowledge that he or she has already been forgiven **more** than he or she is being **asked** to forgive. We believe miracle grace has been extended to us. And we believe that grace is living and active in our hearts.

I am of the minority opinion in the church that **all** divorce is sinful. So I am inclined to interpret Jesus' words - even in the so-called **exception clause** - in a more demanding fashion than is the norm.

I believe, much like Moses, Jesus isn't **advocating divorce - even in the face of unfaithfulness.** He makes a **provision** for one of life's greatest breaches of trust and love. But even the exception clause is not a loophole for a person tired of one mate and anxious for the next chance for romance. It's a gracious concession, offered to the one broken by the unfaithfulness of another.

- 5) **THE TEACHING OF JESUS AND THE SPIRIT OF JESUS** - The commands of Jesus are always offered in the context of the gospel. Those who are serious about following Jesus keep His commands. Those who disobey and are truly repentant are forgiven. **These two sides must always be kept together in proper and exact balance.**

I said earlier I interpret Jesus' words on divorce and remarriage in a more demanding way than many. But that's not all that needs to be said. I also interpret Jesus' words on grace and forgiveness and the removal of our guilt in more extensive fashion than many as well.

I take very seriously Paul's reminder that grace cuts into whatever present sin we find ourselves in and **begins a new and fresh creation - a new start.** That includes an second or third marriage. No one should site Jesus' words as somehow **locking people into adulterous situations perpetuously.** No one has the right to mark off people as standing **outside** the realm of divine grace.

This is a hard subject and Jesus' words are hard words. There seems to be no way around the idea that **yes**, divorce is clearly outside the bounds of God's creative will. And **yes**, those who divorce and move on to another **are** adulterous, if Jesus' words mean anything at all. But divorce and remarriage **isn't** the unpardonable sin. Grace can slice into that new marriage with healing, redemptive grace. It is pure and whole and permanent in God's eyes.

And here's why. This is very important. Every time God forgives, He forgives fully. Divorce, while stemming from sin, is not the **unpardonable** sin. The Bible says God **forgets** my sins when they're forgiven through Christ Jesus. I know of **no Scriptural reason for the church to spiritually demote those who have been through a divorce.** God help us to both **obey like Jesus even when obedience is costly or seems totally impossible** and also **forgive like Jesus when it seems the weight of sin seems unbearable.** We are constantly called to both.