

The Permanence of Marriage

Part 2

- Jesus said that anyone who divorces his wife causes her to commit adultery
- And He said that anyone who marries someone who is divorced commits adultery
- So—divorce and remarriage are adultery, unless there are exceptions
- Are there?

Matthew 5.31-32

- If we “remove” the exception clause— if we read the verse without reading “saving for the cause of fornication”— we can clearly see that divorce and remarriage constitute adultery
- Let’s start with that part of the verse
- In what way a man, divorcing his wife, cause her to commit adultery?

- One option is that Jesus presumes remarriage on the part of the woman, and the remarriage constitutes divorce
- The other option is that the divorce itself constitutes adultery—even though the woman is not the one initiating it

- How could that be?
- In exploring that question, we have to add another
- Why is Jesus using 2 different words: adultery and fornication?
- Adultery emphasizes the violation of a covenant—a covenant must exist.
- Fornication emphasizes the sexual immorality of an act—a covenant need not exist

- A man who divorces his wife causes her to break the covenant—even if she doesn't remarry
- Illegitimate divorce victimizes people—and there are “innocent parties”
- Sometimes people oppose divorce on the premise that there are no “innocent parties”

- It is true that all people are sinners, and to that extent, none of us are innocent
- But God doesn't operate that way in the world of human relationships.
- For example, He doesn't permit thievery, because there are "no innocent parties"
- Nor does He command the spouse of the adulterer to die

Let's look at the exception

- “Saving for the cause of fornication”
- There are generally 3 ways of explaining this:
- Jesus is talking about prior to marriage. This is a Jewish Gospel, this is the betrothal (which is itself a marriage covenant)
- This is talking about illegal marriages--incestuous marriages

- Jesus is talking about immorality by one of the partners, during the marriage
- As uncomfortable as it may make people, the third option is the most likely option
- God has already given clear instruction about morality prior to marriage

- Deuteronomy 22.13-21, an accusation of immorality—you may never divorce her if she is innocent
- Deuteronomy 22.23-27, if a woman is betrothed, possible death
- Deuteronomy 22.28-30, not betrothed, but sexually active, they must marry and never divorce

- The incest/illegal marriages position says that Jesus is talking about prohibited marriages in Leviticus 18.6-18
- But it seems hard to connect Jesus' intent to only that passage

- Adultery is a word that focuses upon the violation of an oath, or covenant
- Jeremiah 23.10
- James 4.4
- Fornication is a word that emphasizes continuity of conduct
- Genesis 38.24. The Greek OT uses the word “porneia”
- Exodus 34.15