

Third Presbyterian Church
Bible Study
Sermon on the Mount – Lesson 13
“Divorce”

Matthew 5:31-32 (NIV)

³¹ "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.'

³² But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.

Discussion Questions:

1. In what ways do divorce hurt people?
2. What are some of the reasons for divorce?
3. As we talked last week, marriage is a covenant between two people and God. To adult means to break the covenant. Review some of the things we do to break covenant with our marriage partner.
4. Marriage was ordained/Designed by God. When something is purchased if you want everything the designer intended, we must follow the designer's recommendation. In marriage when we by-pass the designer we get married looking for the ideal, that quickly turns into an ordeal and we then begin to look for a new deal.
 - a. Marriage is based on commitment to God and to one another. Why do you feel there are so many divorces even in the Christian community?
 - b. Why if we don't have a foundation of God in your single life all of our relationships seem to be unstable?
 - c. Agree or disagree with the following statement and defend your position: Without a foundation of God in our lives, we are just too selfish to be in relationship with anyone
5. Society today has demoted marriage to “Dating real hard,” therefore the least small storm leads to divorce.
 - a. What do you think couples can do the strengthen their marriage

- b. A stormproof marriage does not mean that storms won't be encountered it means storms won't destroy the marriage. What in your opinion are some things that can storm proof a marriage?
6. Discuss the following: Divorce is not an unpardonable sin. True or false, why?
 - a. Why do some in the church community consider Divorce an unpardonable sin? How does this disposition weaken the ministry?
7. **Share your thoughts about the following passage**
 - a. **Jeremiah 3:6-8 (KJV)** ⁶ The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen *that* which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot. ⁷ And I said after she had done all these *things*, Turn thou unto me. But she returned not. And her treacherous sister Judah saw *it*. ⁸ And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding **Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce**; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also.
8. What should a person do if they find their marriage in trouble?
9. Share your major takeaways from the sermon/lesson this week.

Commentary

The Real Meaning of Divorce, [5:31-32](#)

(5:31-32) Introduction— Divorce: throughout history there have always been two schools of thought when interpreting the laws of society—the strict, conservative interpreters and the broad, liberal interpreters. In Jesus' day, the strict interpreters were known as the school of Shammai; the broad interpreters were known as the school of Hillel. In dealing with the subject of divorce, Shammai said the words "some uncleanness" found in [Deut. 24:1](#) allowed for divorce, but the words meant adultery and adultery only. Hillel said "some uncleanness" meant that anything that destroyed unity was a justified reason for divorce; that perfect unity had to be maintained in the marriage state. Such allowance had disintegrated into the position that anything displeasing to a man was reason enough for divorce.

A person can easily see which school human nature and most societies followed. Divorce had become so common that society itself was threatened. All a man had to do to divorce his wife was to have a Rabbi write out a bill of divorcement and hand it to his wife in the presence of two witnesses. The divorce was immediate and final

1. **(5:31) Divorce:** the law against divorce was given for three reasons.

1. To protect the family.

"But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no

more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" ([Mark 10:6-9](#)).

"For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh" ([Ephes. 5:31](#)).

2. To protect the land or nation, preventing national disintegration

"By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted: but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked" ([Proverbs 11:11](#)).

"Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" ([Proverbs 14:34](#)).

3. To prevent a person from becoming an adulterer

"And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery" ([Matthew 19:9](#); cp. [Luke 16:18](#)).

"And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery" ([Mark 10:12](#)).

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord" ([Ephes. 5:22](#)).

2. ([5:32](#)) **Divorce**: the real meaning of the law is that divorce is disallowed. Enormous protection is seen in this pronouncement. There is protection of the family, including the wife, husband, and children. There is emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual protection—protection against a family being ripped apart and having to undergo all the strain and disruption that follows. Divorce is one of the most traumatic experiences of human life. For many it is the most traumatic experience.

Divorce *touches* so many. It *touches*...

- husband
- wife
- children
- parents
- friends
- employer & employees

Divorce *affects* each person it touches, affects them ever so deeply. It *affects*...

- mind
- spirit
- behavior
- joy
- security
- hopes
- plans
- peace
- faith
- emotions
- love
- possessions
- control
- purpose
- estates

Divorce drastically *changes* each person's life. It *changes*...

- personal life • recreational life
- private life • social life
- home life • dream life
- parental life

Because divorce affects human life so much, it is of critical concern to Christ. When anyone hurts, Christ hurts. And because divorce hurts so much and hurts so many, Christ sets out to correct man's corrupt concept of marriage and easy divorce.

Thought 1. Teaching, preaching, and living by strict principles takes enormous courage. Christ demonstrated enormous courage by going against the grain of society and demanding strictness in marriage.

Thought 2. There are four attitudes to marriage, three of which are *loose attitudes* that often lead to divorce.

- 1) *A back-door marriage*: "If it works, OK; if it doesn't work, OK."
- 2) *A cheap, sensual marriage*: based upon some reason other than love, some reason such as attractiveness, sex, or finances.
- 3) An adventuresome marriage: the marriage is entered into for the experience and the adventure of being married.
- 4) *A marriage of commitment*: the full conviction of both spouses that they should fulfill the solemn vows taken—a conviction before God.

Thought 3. There is only one basis for marriage that can absolutely prevent divorce: a true union, both a spiritual and physical union

"What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" ([Mark 10:9](#)).

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord....Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" ([Ephes. 5:22](#), [29](#)).

"For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh" ([Ephes. 5:31](#)).

3. ([5:32](#)) Adultery— Fornication: the exception for divorce is the sin of fornication being committed by one of the spouses. The great tragedy of fornication or adultery is that it breaks the union and attachment between husband and wife. The union and attachment and all that goes with it—faith, hope, love, trust, assurance, confidence, and strength—are broken. If the husband and wife are not believers, then the physical union and the mental union of the marriage are broken. If they are believers, then all three unions are broken: the physical, mental, *and spiritual*.

1. Christ does not stand with either the conservative or the liberal school discussed in note one. He does not mention either school or either position.

2. Christ says two things about divorce.
 - a. Divorce is not the purpose of God. This is silent, but clearly understood.
 - b. Divorce is allowed only if one of the spouses has committed adultery.

What Christ is trying to prevent is what history shows. Societies have tragically ignored the command of God. They have planted the seed of national disintegration, that is, broken homes. This brief statement on divorce shows the great need to protect men, women, children, and the home. It points to the immense value of all three.

Thought 1. There are two exceptions pointed out in the note on [1 Cor. 7:12](#). Some of the sins that cause divorce are also discussed in [1 Cor. 7:12-16](#).

"Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body" ([1 Cor. 6:18](#); cp. [1 Cor. 7:2](#)).

"But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints" ([Ephes. 5:3](#)).

"Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry" ([Col. 3:5](#); cp. [1 Thes. 4:3](#)).

Thought 2. It should always be remembered that adultery is not the only sin that can break the union of a marriage. Faith, hope, love, trust, assurance, confidence, strength—all can be dashed upon the rocks of selfishness and meanness.

Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible - Commentary - The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – Matthew I.