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The Drama of Marriage — Divorce & Remarriage, Pt 2

Selected Passages

PowerPoint Presentation: None

Keywords: Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, Deuteronomy 24:1-4, Matthew 5:31-32.

SermonAudio blurb:

I. Introduction.

- A. We consider together again what the Bible has to say about divorce and remarriage.
 - 1. An emotional topic.
 - 2. A misunderstood topic.
 - 3. Too often defined by our culture rather than the Word.
- B. Reminder that marriage is a key component in the declaration of victory by God the Father through Jesus Christ to the powers of this age.
- C. Reminder of the mystery Paul says marriage is actually about.
- D. We established key texts last week that were very clear, though uncomfortable in ways, regarding divorce and remarriage.
 - 1. Luke 16:18.
 - a. The context was Jesus attacking the false teachings and motives of the religious leaders who sought to gain the approval of man over God.
 - b. The point was simple and straightforward — to divorce and remarry results in adultery occurring.
 - (1) No caveats, no strings, and no exceptions.
 - (2) Again, remember, Jesus is correcting a very dangerous way of thinking. The idea that you can have it both ways, you can love God and not want to honor Him in keeping His commandments.
 - 2. Mark 10:1-12.
 - a. Here Jesus is again dealing with the way the teaching of the Old Testament had been twisted out of shape by many teachers including the Pharisees.

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- b. They seek to trip Him up by asking a question of the Law regarding divorce.
 - c. However, we saw that He ignored the trap and simply took them, and us, back to Genesis 2 where we were reminded that at the marriage two become one flesh.
 - d. This led to Jesus then adding to what Genesis 2 said by saying, “What God has joined together let know one pull apart.”
 - (1) Again such a strong and clear statement.
 - (2) If there were exceptions you would expect them to be present here.
 - e. Finally, when He was alone with the disciples He picks back up His teaching. He makes three points:
 - (1) If a man divorces his wife and marries another, he is committing adultery against his wife.
 - (2) A woman who divorces her husband and remarries commits adultery.
 - (3) Jesus treats both males and females the same insofar as marriage and divorce.
- E. Today we will begin to look at the passages that are used to teach how divorce and remarriage is permissible.

II. Key texts:

- A. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (much of this material on this specific passage is through D. D'Amour).
- 1. It is this passage that so many of our passages have a reference back to in some way. Last week, one of our passages, Mark 10, referred to this Old Testament passage.
 - 2. This passage is difficult to handle and as a result tends to cause us problems as we don't like to work the challenges out.
 - 3. One key difficulty is the precise meaning of the Hebrew phrase usually translated "indecency" or "unclean thing."
 - a. Why is this important? Because it is common for teachers to try to make this passage refer to the two passages in Matthew that talk about unchastity or immorality.

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- (1) **Matthew 5:32** but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for *the* cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.
 - (2) **Matthew 19:9** "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."
 - (3) In both of these passages the normal understanding of what these words mean is to commit adultery.
- b. Now this is attractive at first glance. But it unravels as it is looked at more carefully.
- c. There are two basic reasons for this:
- (1) The first is that the word for “indecency” is hard to pin down as to meaning. Very hard. Look at Deuteronomy 23:13-14 for an example, where this word is used.
 - (2) The second is that though this passage describe something unclean about the wife, it can’t refer to adultery, for in Deuteronomy 22 God clearly made that a capital offense and she was to be killed. There would not be an opportunity to give a certificate of divorce.
4. A second difficulty is in understanding what is actually being commanded here. **(First Slide)**
- a. I want to show you that this is NOT commanding divorce, NOT commanding the writing of a certificate of divorce, and NOT commanding remarriage.
 - b. This is what is known as “case law.”
 - (1) Case law is simply law that is addressing a specific situation, or specific case.
 - (2) When you deal with case law in the bible there is a process that it goes through.
 - (a) First there is the description—usually found starting with “if” or “when.”
 - (b) Second there is the prescription—usually found following the term “then.”

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- (c) What is crucial to understand in this is that **only** what is the prescription is what is to be obeyed.
 - (d) The description is simply stating what is happening, not if it is right for others to do, or even if it is acceptable.
- (3) Two examples: (Second Slide)
- (a) Deuteronomy 21:15-16, “**If** a man has two wives...and the first-born son belongs to the unloved [wife], **then** it shall be in the day he wills his inheritance to his sons, he cannot designate the son of the loved [wife] the first-born.”
 - (b) Deuteronomy 24:7, “**If** a man is caught kidnaping any of his countrymen of the sons of Israel, and he deals with him violently, or sells him, **then** that thief shall die; so you shall purge the evil from among you.”
 - (c) Important to note what is going on:
 - i) Is the passage in 21:15-16 commanding us to have two wives? Is it commanding us to not long one wife? Is it telling us to not let the first-born son lose out on his rightly inheritance because his mother is not loved? NO!
 - ii) What are all of those things I just asked? They are the case. The circumstances that are existing and God is dealing with by making law.
 - iii) What follows the “then” is the actual command.
- c. What is the point?
- (1) The Pharisees in Matthew 19 are going to try to make this passage in Deuteronomy 24 to mean that Moses was commanding them to divorce their wife.
 - (2) But that cannot be, because the first half of that passage up to the “then” is all description.

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- (3) It is just the sad reality that the hard hearts of Israel was such that the men were, in fact, divorcing their wives.
 - (4) Therefore God was giving, through Moses, the case law on how to deal with these situations. And the law was plain, “You can never remarry your wife if she remarries after you divorce her, because she is now defiled.”
 - (5) That, and only that is the law stated in Deuteronomy 24. Keep that in mind when we go to Matthew 19.
5. A third difficulty is with the KJV’s translation of this passage. It has caused no end of troubles over the last few hundred years.
- a. The best way to do this is to show you some translations side by side so that you can see what happened. Now pay attention to what you see up on the screen and try to see the difference. (Third Slide)

KJV

Deuteronomy 24:1 “When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favor in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give *it* in her hand, and send her out of his house. ² And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's *wife*. ³ And *if* the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth *it* in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her *to be* his wife; ⁴ Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that *is* abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee *for* an inheritance.”

NASB

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 "When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that 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 from his house, ² and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's *wife*, ³ and if the latter husband turns against 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 husband dies who took her to be his wife, ⁴ then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance.

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- b. Now, remember what I just taught you about case law. When did the prescription, the command start? After the “then.”
 - c. So what has happened here is that by putting a “then” in verse one the translators moved the command all the way up to verse 1 instead of verse 4!
 - d. There is more also. In verse 2 notice how the translators said that “she may go.” Meaning that she has the permission to go and remarry.
 - e. Neither of these is what the Hebrew text says and had no business being there. But they were put there and have helped create a lot of confusion and flat out error in the church.
 - f. This leads the readers of the KJV to believe that the man is supposed to divorce his wife for this unclean thing, and that the wife has God's sanctioned blessing to marry another man. **But that is not taught anywhere in the text.**
6. Remember, case law does not, in the main, function to prescribe "how to" do things. They function by responding to existing situations and problems. They restrain evil, given that evil happens.
7. Now, why does God permit these things within Israel and not speak against the reality of divorce? We don't know. There are many places where they acted sinfully—we saw one of them in Deuteronomy 21 with the firstborn son of an unloved wife.
- a. We can only accept it and trust that God has His purposes.
 - b. But what we can't do is decide that since they were allowed, or tolerated, that it is alright for us to go do the same.
8. Now, having said what Deuteronomy 24 is not teaching, what is it teaching?
- a. That is actually hard to be absolutely certain on all the details.
 - b. What we do know is that a woman who remarried after a divorce cannot become a wife to her first husband ever again.
 - c. The reason for this is most likely a financial reason (Heth, "Divorce, but No Remarriage," in *Four Christian Views*, 85).
- (1) First, the customs (not biblical injunctions) stated that if a wife was guilty of severe social (financial or household)

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misconduct or sexual sin short of adultery, her husband could divorce her without any financial consequences (i.e., alimony-free).

- (2) Second, if the husband died, or there was a divorce for other reasons that what I just said, the wife is entitled to a financial settlement. "At the very least her dowry would be restored," but usually more expenses were involved, such as money for a year's worth of living.
- (3) In other words, here is a woman who is found to be unclean by the first husband. He divorces her and gets to keep the dowry, this divorce costs him nothing.
 - (a) She now remarries, the second husband has to pay a dowry as well.
 - (b) Over time he comes to "hate" her (that is the word in verse 3 "turns against her." This was a technical term that was used for something less than finding her to be unclean or indecent.
 - (c) The custom of the land was that he had to pay her back her dowry and an additional year's living expenses.
- (4) Now she is a woman of means and the first husband would be tempted to remarry her to gain all that money.
- d. It must be understood, then, that this passage seems to be dealing with a **very particular circumstance**: manipulating a wife like a commodity for financial advancement.

9. But let me end with this passage by making it very clear that it does not teach that you can divorce for adultery, as the death penalty was the punishment for such.

B. Matthew 5:31-32.

1. We looked at this already last week so I merely want to pull out some key observations in light of what I just taught you.
 - a. Remember that this passage and the one in Matthew 19 are the major passages for many to authorize divorce and remarriage in the church.
 - b. Good, respected men differ here and that must be kept in view.

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- c. The challenge for each of you is not which teacher you choose to follow but how well the text is explained so that you can choose in a clear conscience.
 - d. Remember that a key part of living out our lives as Christians is guarding our conscience. Romans 14 is very blunt that we are not to violate that conscience, it is a gift from God.
2. Remember this passage is part of the Sermon on the Mount.
- a. First, notice the reference to Deuteronomy 24 Notice that “let him give” is a command.
 - b. But we learned that the Deuteronomy passage is not commanding a person to give a certificate of divorce at all.
 - c. Jesus is purposely not quoting the Old Testament passage, rather, He is giving a summary of how the Pharisees had reworked the passage to make it a command allowing for divorce
3. We also saw that the headship of the divorcing husband is not relinquished.
- a. He is not saying to the man that if you divorce and remarry that you commit adultery.
 - b. He is saying that when you divorce your wife, you are making her commit adultery.
 - c. In other words, the husband is being held responsible and blameable for her actions.
4. The exception is for “unchastity” or “sexual immorality.”
- a. This is where the challenge lies with each of us. What is meant by that term?
 - b. If you were to ask those pastors and teachers who allow for divorce in certain situation what is the specific situation given by the bible they would likely state “adultery.”
 - c. The problem:
 - (1) That is not what this word means. It is a very broad term that speaks to any sort of immoral living and thinking.
 - (2) But interestingly it is often separated from adultery, which is in its own class.

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- (a) We see it in our passage just a few words over.
 - (b) Matthew 15:19.
 - (c) In 2 Corinthians 12:21 and Galatians 5:19 it is part of a list of various types of sexual sin.
 - (d) Therefore, what Jesus Christ is speaking of is a broad range of impure activities. It would simply be wrong to limit it to only adultery.
- (3) But the greatest reason why this term should not be used to refer to adultery is that it was a capital offense.

III. Conclusion.

- A. My goal today was simple. It was to create honest questions in the minds of those who have already landed on a position that makes divorce and remarriage allowable.
 - 1. If Deuteronomy 24 is discussing a case law and never commands divorce to occur; rather it legislates what is to happen if divorce occurs, then how can we use it properly in the Church today?
 - 2. If the term “immorality” in Matthew 5 doesn’t mean adultery then how do we continue to call it adultery? If we are going to hold to divorce as being allowable then isn’t it necessary to open it up to all types of immorality?
- B. Next week we will look at the Matthew 19 passage and the one in 1 Corinthians 7 and it is then that I will propose a better way to view this whole messy subject.
- C. As I close out today I want to remind you of some key realities:
 - 1. The gospel is a promise of true forgiveness of sin because of the perfect work of Jesus Christ.
 - a. But that never means that we therefore sin because we have the grace of God in our lives. Romans 6 bluntly rejects that option in every way.
 - b. Rather, the gospel calls us all to come as sinners to God the Father through His Son, Jesus. We come not because we are acceptable to God but because Jesus is.
 - c. As forgiven sinners we then battle the sin in our lives. Not to be accepted by God but because we already are loved and accepted.
 - 2. The gospel never promises to eliminate the messy, ugly, painful and even deadly consequences of sin on this side of the resurrection.

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- a. People still go to prison.
 - b. People still suffer physical maladies.
 - c. Relationships still exist destroyed.
 - d. Reputation are still obliterated.
3. The gospel never allows you to resent those consequences. Rather, it enables you to endure faithfully under them because your hope is not here in this age anymore.
- a. We look to the return of our Lord.
 - b. We look to the day when all things are made new.
 - c. We hope and long for the time when sorrows turn to joy and all that burdens us fall away to never be remembered again.
4. But remember also beloved that all of this teaching is not on how to ruin your life but on how we live out a dynamic faith that proclaims to this fallen, hopeless age that keeps failing everyone, that Jesus Christ has destroyed the powers of this age and we do not live under that broken power anymore.

Community Group Questions

- **This is the first sermon so it is important for all involved to not make conclusions yet. Caution the group to make observations from the sermon but shy away from hard conclusions. It is best for the groups to talk about what stood out in the message. What questions are raised in the minds of the people (please CGLs write down key questions to give to me, I plan on addressing them in a sermon).**
- **My closing statements about how the gospel is not way to escape consequences of sin is important. Ask how the people have, perhaps, mistakenly thought that in their own lives. How can they fight that temptation?**