

Matthew

Sermon on the Mount

May 26, 2024

I. Introduction

A. **Matthew 5:31-37**, “It was said, ‘Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce’; [32] but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. [33] Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.’ [34] But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, [35] or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. [36] Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. [37] But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; anything beyond these is of evil.”

B. Review – Surpassing righteousness – Right relationships

1. Jesus said that unless our righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, we will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. He then goes on to contrast what the scribes and Pharisees taught concerning six specific commandments with the way godly people (*those who will enter the kingdom of heaven*) understand and practice them.
2. One of the ways to view these six commandments is that they deal with human relationships – in one way or another. For example:
 - a. The first commandment is about murder and establishes that the value of relationships is equal to the value of life itself – which means relationship murder is as evil as physical murder.
 - b. The next two (*adultery, divorce*) deal with the marriage relationship (*our most intimate of human relationships*) and show that as a spouse we are to promote and protect its sanctity.
 - c. The commandment on vows (*keeping our word*) applies to every relationship – including the marriage vows, given that the laws on adultery and divorce directly precede it.
 - d. The final two (*an eye for an eye, love neighbor/hate enemy*) call us to show unbelievers that one significant difference between them and us is the value we place on relationships and the importance we place on treating others as we want to be treated.
3. Today, our focus is on Jesus’ teaching dealing with divorce and making vows, or keeping our word.

C. Pray

II. Devaluing relationships through divorce and breaking our word

A. **Divorce:** [31] “It was said, ‘Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce’; [32] but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

1. According to the Bible, adultery is the one act that breaks the oneness of the marriage relationship and therefore the one God-approved reason for a Christian to divorce his or her spouse. For example:
2. **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.”
 - a. In Jesus’ day, there were two views of the words, “**some indecency**” in vs 1. The School of Shammai taught that the only reason a man could divorce his wife was adultery.
 - b. The School of Hillel taught that a man could divorce his wife for any reason regardless of how trivial.
 - c. Here in **Matthew 5:32 & 19:9**, Jesus makes it clear that the words “**some indecency**” only refer to adultery.
3. **Malachi 2:13-16**, “This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. [14] Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’ Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom **you have dealt treacherously**, though she is your companion and **your wife by covenant**. [15] *But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring?* Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. [16] ‘For **I hate divorce**,’ says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘and him who covers his garment with wrong,’ says the LORD of hosts. So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.”

- a. Notice God's use of the words, "**your wife by covenant**," for they match with the wording of **Matthew 5:33-37** where Jesus talks about keeping your word.
 - b. And notice that God says "**I hate divorce**." Why? Because God's purpose from the beginning is that we would be one flesh for the duration of our lives – as shown by the way He created us whereby we need a male and female for procreation, thus becoming one flesh.
4. **Matthew 19:3-9**, "Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?' [4] And He answered and said, 'Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, [5] and said, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"? [6] So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.' [7] They said to Him, 'Why then did **Moses command** to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?' [8] He said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart **Moses permitted** you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. [9] And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.'"
5. As with adultery, Jesus directs His statements on divorce to the men.
- a. The legal reason is because, under Jewish law, the wife could break the marriage contract by committing adultery, but only the husband could legally divorce his wife.
 - b. The practical reason was because men were abusing their right to divorce by making personal happiness more important than the "one flesh" of marriage, and the marriage vows.
6. In applying Jesus' teaching today, it is reasonable to say that if either party commits adultery, they have broken the union (*oneness*) by joining themselves to another. Therefore, according to scripture, the faithful spouse is free to divorce and remarry.
- a. If neither party has committed adultery, yet they divorce, remarriage on the part of either party puts them in the position of committing adultery, because they are still one flesh with their previous spouse.
 - b. Sadly, the prevalence of divorce in the church is equal to that in the world – which means that many Christians value personal happiness more than (1) relationships in general, (2) the oneness of the marriage relationship, (3) the giving of their word to remain

married until death parts them, (4) the emotional health of their children, (5) the destructive example they are setting for future generations, (6) God and God's intentions for marriage when He created males and females, and (7) having a righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees.

- c. Raising the value of personal happiness above the value of the marriage relationship may seem reasonable in the moment, but as with all selfish and sinful choices, it changes us for the worse and makes life harder than it has to be for all involved.
7. Paul affirms the Christian position on divorce in **1 Corinthians 7:10-13 & 15**, "But to the married I give instructions, **not I, but the Lord**, that the wife should not leave her husband [11] (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife. [12] But to the rest **I say**, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. [13] And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away. [15] Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister **is not under bondage** in such cases (*possibly free to remarry if the leaving spouse remarries*), but God has called us to [live together in] peace."
8. Two final thoughts:
 - a. God's way is to make your relationship with your spouse a priority over any other relationship, except your relationship with God.
 - b. Remaining single if divorced is a "let your light shine" kind of choice that supports the sanctity of the marriage relationship, supports the value of relationships in general, supports the authority of God's word, and brings glory to God and His ways.

B. Keeping our word: [33] "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.' [34] But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, [35] or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. [36] Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. [37] But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no' (*let your 'Yes' mean yes and your 'No' mean no*); anything beyond these is of evil."

1. In keeping with the context, beginning with having a righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, and including Jesus' teaching on adultery and divorce, it is reasonable to apply this teaching

- on keeping our word to the promise we make to remain faithful (*i.e., no adultery, no divorce*) to the marriage relationship.
2. It is also clear from the larger context that keeping our word is a matter of integrity, an integrity that comes from within (*our heart*) and permeates our character.
 - a. In other words, whether it is our marriage vows or any other commitment or promise we make, the label “Christian” should be synonymous with keeping our word.
 - b. In other words, we should be known for keeping our word to our spouse, our children, our extended family, our friends, our neighbors, our employer or boss, our co-workers, or anyone else to whom we make an implied or clearly spoken or written promise or pledge or vow.
 - c. For example, when the children ask how soon we are leaving a place, our answer should be reasonable and clear, and our actions should show that we keep our word.
 - (1) When we tell our spouse we will do something or be someplace at a certain time, we should be known for keeping our word.
 - (2) When resolving a conflict in the home or with a neighbor or at work or at church, we should be known for living up to any agreement we make.
 - (3) When agreeing to a certain course of action – even if it is not what we prefer, or if we agree under pressure, we should be known for keeping our word.
 3. Though people make empty promises and false commitments to buy time, or appease someone that is upset with them, or make it seem they are committed to resolving a conflict when in reality they aren’t, we ought never do such a thing.
 - a. Making empty promises and false commitments is not only deceptive and self-serving, it works against love, godliness, and God-honoring relationships.
 - b. As Jesus put it, pretending to be sincere in giving our word when it is probable we will not keep our word is “**of evil**” (**vs 37**). And to His words I add, it is deceitful, manipulative, selfish, irresponsible, unloving, and treats relationships as less valuable than our own happiness or sense of well-being – all aspects of evil that have their roots in our heart and are part of our character.
 - c. The reality is, making empty promises and false commitments goes to the depth of what is in our heart, not just how we want to be seen on the outside.

4. However, as Christians, the failure to keep our word not only makes us look bad, it makes God look bad – which works against Jesus’ exhortation to let our light shine in such a way that those who see us keeping our word will glorify God.
 - a. In other words, unfulfilled promises and commitments, and the breaking of our word means we are letting our light shine in such a way that others will see that we are **not** trustworthy, and then conclude that our God is **not** worthy to be glorified.
 - b. I believe it is for this reason that Jesus said to “make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King.”
 - c. Yet even if we don’t bring God into our promises or vows, we still make God look bad when unbelievers see us breaking our word.
5. Finally, there are three scriptures that directly support Jesus’ teaching on vows and keeping our word.
 - a. **Exodus 20:7** “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.”
 - b. **James 5:12**, “But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment.”
 - c. **Deuteronomy 23:21-23**, “When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the LORD your God will surely require it of you. [22] However, if you refrain from vowing, it would not be sin in you. [23] **You shall be careful to perform what goes out from your lips**, just as you have voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God, what you have promised.”

III. Conclusion

- A. How we deal with relationship murder, marital unfaithfulness, divorce, and breaking our word reveals who is most important to us – either God or ourselves, and what is most important to us – either relationships or personal happiness and a sense of well-being.
- B. As God’s people, may we wisely and consistently choose God and relationships over self.