

A MATTER OF RESPECT

Matthew 5:31-32

I. INTRODUCTION

The third anti-thesis naturally follows the second one because:

- It is a continuation of the theme of faithfulness.
- Divorce often follows the sin of adultery

II. TEXT—Mt 5:31-32

KJV—31 *It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: 32 But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.*

NASB—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.*

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 sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.*

III. BACKGROUND

A. OLD TESTAMENT LAW

Dt 24:1-4—1 *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*

B. LEGAL SITUATION

1. The *bill of divorce*

a. Was a protective device for women

b. **Mk 10**—says Moses did this because of “the hardness of your hearts”

- Jewish women were treated like property
- Jewish men were sending their women away—with no protection—no rights
- Sometimes reclaiming them as their own property—so the women were not free

c. How the bill helped women

- Man could not drive wife from home and afterward claim she was still his wife
- He had to give her document that freed her completely.
- Also had to add proviso that she was free to marry someone else.

2. Only a man could take direct action to divorce

a. What about Jesus' statement concerning woman divorcing husband—[Mt 19/Mk10](#)?

b. Solution to question:

1. A wife was not permitted to divorce her husband
2. But she could petition the court
3. If her plea was accepted the court would direct the husband to divorce her.

C. CULTURAL SITUATION

1. Jewish, Roman, Greek tradition allowed remarriage after legal divorce
2. Jewish tradition
 - a. Gave all advantages to the man
 - b. Made it easy to divorce
 - c. Encouraged serial divorce—equivalent to adultery
 - d. Raised debate in rabbinical schools about permissible divorce

D. RABBINIC TRADITIONS

1. **Hillel**

- Allowed man to divorce wife “for any good cause”
- Could be for minor offence—such as burning the food

2. **Shammai**

- Allowed divorce only for the cause of adultery

3. All traditions—*required* divorce in the event of adultery

- But the laws for proving adultery were very stringent!
- Required four witnesses of actual act!

IV. EXPLANATION

A. JESUS' GENERAL APPROACH

1. Jesus was laying down general principles concerning faithfulness in marriage
2. He was not giving a detailed legal list of what constituted legal divorce

B. JESUS' RESPONSE AND THE RABBINIC DEBATE

1. He is stricter than both Rabbinic traditions
 - a. They both *required* divorce for the cause of adultery
 - b. Jesus did not require divorce
 - c. He only *allowed* it—but only under one condition
 1. Yet His condition is morally sounder than Shammai's
 2. Since he considers any marital unfaithfulness
 - **πορνεία**—any sexual impurity
 - Not just adultery
 3. So one was not saddled with burdensome proof of adultery when mate was unfaithful
 - Required 2 witnesses—who actually saw the act!
2. Later—**Mt 19/Mk10**—Jesus says *either* party that divorces the other one is guilty of adultery

C. JESUS EXPANDED UNDERSTANDING OF THE LAW

1. Implication of not requiring divorce: reconciliation should be attempted first
2. He steps up as advocate for the woman
 - a. Because—to divorce the woman put her in an impossible situation
 - b. The Greek word is not a noun—not become an 'adulteress'
 - c. Instead a verb—makes her commit adultery
 - d. It puts her in a situation so she cannot be faithful to the original marriage
 1. This is a *state of being*—regardless of whether she remarries!
 2. The divorce *itself* creates adultery—breaking of life-long covenant
3. Indirectly he is challenging the whole system of serial divorce
 - So—he goes further in championing the dignity and respect of the wife
4. So—Jesus is returning to the original intent of marriage—lifelong faithfulness
5. Divorce is like breaking one's covenant with God

Malachi 2:13-16—13 *"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.”

6. Divorce also causes social/cultural stigmatization

- Culture sees the woman as immoral—like an adulteress
- Anyone who marries her is also stigmatized

7. But this does not mean that re-marrying itself is adultery

- a. The adultery of the previous marriage is past
- b. A new covenant has been made that must be honored
- c. So what about Mark 10 and Matthew 19
 1. If a man/woman divorces and remarries he/she commits adultery
 2. This means—he/she divorces with a view toward remarrying
 3. The cause is not sexual infidelity of one’s mate—but the desire for another person

D. A SYSTEMATIC ‘DOCTRINE OF DIVORCE’?

1. Each passage is dealing with a different context
 - a. Matthew 5—Jesus is laying down broad kingdom principles for His disciples
 - b. Matthew 19 and Mark 10—Jesus is answering trick question by Pharisees
 - c. Luke 16—Jesus makes a comment against different background
 1. The Pharisees were deriding Jesus because they were covetous
 2. Jesus then said : what the world values, God abhors!
 3. Then He said the Law/Prophets are enduring—would not pass away
 4. So—the worldly Jewish traditions inconsistent with God’s law were an abomination
 5. Just such a situation existed with the serial divorces of the Jews—no respect for the law
 - d. I Corinthians 17—Paul is talking to believers and marriage in context of church
 1. He says God says for believers to stay together—period
 2. He gives his *own* practical advice about relationships in believer-unbeliever marriages
2. Be careful about weaving a systematic theology from disparate texts—out of context