

Lesson 6: Jesus and Remarriage

[Matthew 5: 31-32]

Jesus' reply to the Pharisees had the potential to protect married women. Jesus would not have wanted wives to be divorced and abandoned by their husbands because a divorced woman would have been vulnerable without a source of income, protection or legal rights.

The Bible expresses a clear mandate that we are to protect vulnerable people from injustice. A faulty understanding of Jesus' teaching on divorce cannot be used to overturn this basic principle. We completely miss the point of Jesus' remarks to the Pharisees, and elsewhere, if we insist a spouse remain with an abusive partner in a toxic marriage. Instead, we are to provide consolation, care, and support.

Matthew 5:

³¹ "Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'

³² But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except ¹¹sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.

Despite the fact that the Mosaic law included provisions regulating divorce, the Old Testament makes it clear that divorce falls short of God's ideal. It is not surprising that when questioned about divorce and remarriage, Jesus took his listeners all the way back to the beginning, reminding them that God created humanity as male and female and stipulated that the man, upon marriage, was to leave his father and mother and "cleave" to his wife in a one-flesh, one-mind, one-spirit union and that "no one and nothing" should be able to separate them.

Matthew 19:

³ Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"

⁴ "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,'

⁵ and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'

⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate."

⁷ "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?"

⁸ Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.

⁹ I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

¹⁰ The disciples said to him, “If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.”

¹¹ Jesus replied, “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given.

¹² For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.”

The expanded revelation regarding marriage seems to rest on the phrase, *“Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.”* which Jesus added to the original text of **Genesis 2:24**.

The essential question is simply how can you be sure that the joining of a couple in marriage has been orchestrated and ordained by God? If they are absolutely certain their union is God’s doing, then the commitment to stay together, to love, forgive and strive to understand each other in good and bad times until they are separated by death is consistent with the Biblical mandate for marriage.

The response of Jesus’s audience makes it clear that they thought the Mosaic stipulations regarding marriage had superseded God’s original purposes at creation. In their thinking, why else would divorce have been regulated in Mosaic law? According to Jesus, however, the Mosaic statutes were not to replace the Creator’s original intent but to acknowledge the human hardness of heart.

Recognizing the high standard set by Jesus, his original followers responded, *“If such is the case . . . it is better not to marry”*. Jesus, brushing aside their objection, replies that while a few may indeed have the gift of celibacy, this is a lifestyle that cannot be imposed on everyone. In a similar manner, his teachings on the permanence of a marriage will not be acceptable for everyone. In these instances, it is essential that we do not judge those who have divorced and remarried but rather follow an example of grace as evidenced in the ministry of Jesus.

John 4:

¹³ Jesus answered and said to her, “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again,

¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”

¹⁵ The woman said to Him, “Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.”

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.”

¹⁷ The woman answered and said, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You have well said, ‘I have no husband,’

¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly.”

¹⁹ The woman said to Him, “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.

²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.”

²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father.

²² You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.

²³ But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.

²⁴ God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

²⁸ The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men,

²⁹ “Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?”

Jesus did not condemn this woman because of her multiple failed marriages or reject her as an adulteress. He acknowledged the pain of what she had endured and extended an invitation for her to be healed. Furthermore, he even looked beyond the lowliness of her place in society as a Samaritan and woman and welcomed her into the kingdom as a “*true worshipper*.”

God’s original standard for marriage still stands insofar that Jesus advocated the permanence of marriage as a divine rather than merely human institution; nevertheless, in a constantly changing and sin-plagued world filled with emotionally wounded and broken-hearted people, we must also embrace the challenge to become a source of redemption, restoration, care and compassion.