

Divorce and Our Words

Overcoming Bad Passions –part 4

Matthew 5:31-37; July 27, 2014

DAY 1: Divorce

1. We continue our walk through Matthew 5, where Jesus illustrates the effects of bad passions. This week we'll look at two separate illustrations: divorce, and our words.

Matthew 5:31 "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.'"

2. In the days of Moses the people, men tended to divorce their wives for the lamest of excuses. They thought they were allowed to do that. They were badly mistaken. In order to try to stem the tide of injustice, Moses was allowed, in Deut. 24, to have men required to issue a certificate of divorce.

Deuteronomy 24:1 If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house...

3. The word "*indecent*" was meant to imply a high standard, such as adultery. Instead, sinful man focused on another word in that verse: "*displeasing*." Chaos ensued. Women lost the financial security they had known through marriage and lost legal standing. Writing a "certificate of divorce" was an attempt to "lift" men back to the higher standard of marriage, by making it more difficult to obtain a divorce, thereby protecting the wife, her children and society as a whole.

4. In an effort to discredit Jesus, some of the Jewish religious leaders set this trap...

*Mark 10:2 Some Pharisees came and **tested him** by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"*

³ *"What did Moses command you?" he replied.*

⁴ *They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away."*

⁵ *"It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied.*

⁶ *"But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.'*

⁷ *'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife,*

⁸ *and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one.*

⁹ *Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."*

5. What was the nature of Jesus' response to their question about divorce? Is He more trying to explain the complexities and legalities of divorce or is He more trying to lift men's standards regarding the wonder of marriage and God's lofty intentions in marriage?

6. What problem of the heart did He expose? (v. 5)

DAY 2: Divorce, adultery, and remarriage

Matthew 5:32 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.

1. The bible points to only two legitimate (and biblical) reasons for divorce. What is the reason Jesus gives for a legitimate divorce? (We'll look at the second reason shortly). Why would adultery be grounds for a biblical divorce?

2. The bible points to a second grounds for divorce.

1 Corinthians 7:15 But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.

3. Paul is dealing with a situation where a believer in Christ is married to an unbeliever. What is the moral obligation of the Christian spouse if the non-Christian spouse wants to leave?

4. What about remarriage? What does Paul imply about remarriage in this verse? What does the phrase "not bound" imply about future remarriage?

5. Let's take one more difficult situation.

1 Corinthians 7:10- To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband.

6. Here, Paul is high-lighting the ideal of staying together. But God knows that these situations can become very complex! So listen to what is added in the next verse!

¹¹ But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.

7. Marriages can degrade so badly that it is extremely unlikely that a turnaround can take while the spouses are living under the same roof. What is Paul wanting us to do in these situations?

DAY 3: Keeping your vows

Matthew 5:33 "Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' "

1. Jesus highlights the "generally accepted" teaching about our words. He is not quoting from the scriptures directly. He is "lumping together" what was currently being taught.

2. Oaths in the Old Testament were serious matters as we'll see. Let's look at a few verses on oaths. Under each verse, jot down what strikes you most.

Exodus 20:7 "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name."

Leviticus 19:12 "'Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the Lord."

Numbers 30:2 "When a man makes a vow to the Lord or takes an oath to obligate himself by a pledge, he must not break his word but must do everything he said."

Deut. 23:21 "If you make a vow to the Lord your God, do not be slow to pay it, for the Lord your God will certainly demand it of you and you will be guilty of sin."

3. What struck you the most about making a vow?

4. How would making a vow be helpful?

5. Do you think Jesus is making a connection between "easy divorce" in the previous verses we studied and the seriousness of making vows before the Lord?

DAY 4: Keeping your vows

Matt. 5:34 But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; [35] or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. [36] And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. [37] Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

1. The people had taken the serious instructions about taking and keeping vows and "dumbed" them down to instructions about *how to make vows--the precise and "correct" wording.*

2. What are the differences between focusing on the vow(s) you make and *how* the vows were worded?

3. The people started "swearing" (like in court, not swearing as in anger) in order to prove the validity of what they were vowing. In our day we still do this. When a president takes his "oath of office" he puts his hand on the bible as a way of adding seriousness and commitment to his vows.

4. Jesus gives some examples men used in His day. "I swear by heaven that _____" Another example was, "I swear by the holy city, Jerusalem that _____." From Jesus' point of view, should "swearing by" any of these things add to the seriousness of your vows?

5. This practice by the Jewish religious leaders had turned into the Theatre of the Absurd. Look at these examples.

Matthew 23:16-17 "Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' [17] You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred?"

Matt. 23:18-19 You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.' [19] You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred?"

6. When I was growing up, our truthfulness got "dumbed down" by this kind of swearing. If you were pretty sure someone wasn't telling the truth, you said, "*Swear to God* that you are telling the truth." What inadvertently happened was that swearing made it easier to lie! You really didn't *have* to tell the truth unless you were "made to" by swearing.

7. What is Jesus' remedy for all this nonsense? (Matt. 5:34-37)

DAY 5: Your words and your heart

1. Let's finish this week's study with some additional verses on our words. There is a direct correlation between our hearts and our words. In this section, jot down any insight you have as to your heart and your words...

Matthew 12:34 You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.

Psalms 15:1 Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? [2] He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart [4] ... who keeps his oath even when it hurts,

Proverbs 17:20 A man of perverse heart does not prosper; he whose tongue is deceitful falls into trouble.

2. The following verses deal with the issue of our tongue, more broadly. Jot down any thoughts beneath each verse that are pertinent to you.

Proverbs 13:3 He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin.

Matthew 12:36 But I tell you that men will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every careless word they have spoken.

James 3:9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. [10] Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.

James 3:11 Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? [12] My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

Ephesians 4:25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

3. What part of your speaking needs to be "tightened up?" Is there a vow you need to keep? Do you need to tighten up truth-telling? Are you committed to living a life of truth *from your heart*?