

Sermon on the Mount Sermon Series

Sermon 18

Divorce and Remarriage

Last time we looked at what Jesus said about divorce and remarriage. The Jews thought that the Moses was giving permission in Deuteronomy 24 to divorce and remarry for any reason. It is true that Moses did not forbid the people to do so. However the law in Deuteronomy 24 was not giving a license to divorce and remarry, it was regulating behavior if someone did that. Jesus said that this was not God's plan from the beginning but that Moses did not forbid it because the people's hearts were hard. Jesus said that except for fornication, two married people cannot divorce and remarry.

We also saw that Jesus was not condemning a woman who remarried because she was cast out by her husband. But He made it clear that when she did remarry, it was a violation of the law of God.

Jesus was speaking to Jewish people who knew the law of God and were believers. But as Jesus' followers expanded into the non-Jewish world, different situations arose. Two people were married and they were both unbelievers. Then one of them became a believer and the other was not a believer. Did Jesus' instructions apply to them as well? What should we do in a situation where a person was divorced before they became a believer but now they want to remarry? Is that a violation of God's law? What if someone is a believer, they fall away from the faith, divorce and then they return to the faith? Can they remarry? These are all complicated questions but very important ones.

The apostle Paul answered some questions concerning marriage and divorce in the first epistle to the Corinthians chapter 7. His answers will help shed some light on our topic.

The following two verses describe what should be done when both spouses are believers.

1 Corinthians 7:10-11 Now to the married I command, *yet* not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from *her* husband. ¹¹ But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to *her* husband. And a husband is not to divorce *his* wife.

Paul reiterates what Jesus said about married believers. They should not divorce. But if two believers separate, they are not free to remarry. They are both believers and are bound by the law of God. If one of the two people remarry, they have committed adultery.

It is a sad thing if two people believe in the love and restoring power of God and yet they cannot love each other enough to even live together. We would have to say that there is immaturity of faith in at least one party here probably both. Just because a person is a registered church member does not mean that they have a genuine relationship with God. There needs to be a

cultivation of love and patience. Do you not love your spouse? You can love them. God is love and is the source of love. Ask God to give your love for your spouse. Ask God to change your heart.

But there could be many reasons affecting the immaturity of faith including emotional or mental difficulty. In these cases a separation may take place, but unless there is fornication, they are still married in God's eyes and they cannot remarry someone else.

All too often I have seen the following scenario repeated. Two people come to church regularly and yet they are unhappy in the marriage. They are so unhappy that they come to the pastor for help. Each one expresses how good their life would be if only they were out of the marriage. They both swear that they will never remarry, they only want to live separately. Now they cannot stand to be with that other person that they promised God they would spend their whole life with. So they read that Paul said they can divorce as long as they don't remarry and they separate, they get a divorce. Then the two people do one of two things. Most of the time they remarry someone else within the first year even and they break the law of God. Others wait to see if the other person remarries first. They think that in that case the other person is committing adultery. Then they feel themselves free to remarry. In both these scenarios, where is love?

The whole basis of God's kingdom is love. In the plan of salvation we see God working so hard to save human beings. But they resist God and reject God. Why? They love their sins. But God is always working to reconcile. When these couples divorce and separate as believers, is there really a desire to reconcile? Are they seeking to get back together or are they just looking for an excuse to get out? Are they just waiting for the other person to be guilty so they can pursue another relationship? Is that the love of God? Is the kingdom of God based on that kind of thinking?

If you, as a believer, are in a difficult marriage situation with a believing spouse, what are you doing to reconcile? What are you doing to foster love? Your spouse may be a very difficult person. But you made a vow before God. Unless there is fornication He has not given you a release from that vow. Most people tell me, "God wants me to be happy" implying that they will find happiness with someone else. It is true that God wants you to be happy. But God's law is designed for happiness. You need to find happiness within God's plan. The problem is not with God's requirements. He knows what He is doing. The problem is a lack of love in people's hearts. How carefully people must pray and let God lead them when it comes to entering a marriage. Marriage is for life.

1 Corinthians 7:12-14 But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. ¹³ And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. ¹⁴ For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the

unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.

The apostle Paul introduces another situation here. What if the believer is married to an unbeliever? Should the believer divorce the unbeliever because they do not believe? The answer is "no." Believers should not seek to divorce unbelieving spouses. Children from such marriages are not considered unlawful children. God honors the marriage covenant made according to the laws of the countries we live in.

Paul introduces yet another marriage situation. It has been interpreted in several different ways and so we need to read carefully.

1 Corinthians 7:15 But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such *cases*. But God has called us to peace.

The difficult part has been the words, "not under bondage." Some have thought that it means the believer should not try to force the marriage to continue but still is not free to remarry. This interpretation has been a source of difficulty for those who have been deserted by a spouse. What if a spouse leaves and the believer knows nothing about them? They are just gone. They don't know if they remarried or not. They are in a situation against their will, without a spouse and no possibility to remarry.

Others have thought that the expression "not under bondage" means that if the unbeliever leaves then the believer is free to remarry. This is more or less implied in the Turkish translation which says the person is free. Seventh-day Adventists have understood the passage in this latter sense. If the unbeliever leaves the believer against the believer's will, then the believer is free from the marriage bond and is free to remarry.

There are a number of situations that are not directly mentioned in scripture. What if a person is an unbeliever and divorces and then becomes a believer? Does Jesus' prohibition about not remarrying hold true for this situation? Should they remain unmarried all of their life because they are divorced? We don't think so.

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

We view the new birth experience as a radical change of life, a new beginning. Therefore we consider the events of the "old" life to be buried in the waters of baptism.

The most difficult situations to evaluate are when believers divorce and they leave the faith. This happens a lot. The marriage comes apart and during that painful process the person loses their faith and returns to a worldly lifestyle. But their names remain on the register of the church as church members. Later on they come to their senses and return to the Lord. Now, they are believers, but what about their marital status? Should they remain single all their life? This

situation is not directly handled in scripture. When they come back to the Lord, they should be rebaptized because they have openly turned their back on the Lord and they need to make an open confession. Once they are rebaptized should the rebaptism bury their previous divorce and allow them to remarry? On one hand they divorced with the full knowledge and understanding of God's law. On the other hand their faith was faltering in all of this and later they completely apostatized from the faith. These are difficult decisions and leaders and church members need to be led by the Holy Spirit to know what to do.

Some people have used rebaptism as an excuse to bounce from marriage to marriage. I know of someone who has been married and re-baptized 6 times. That is a farce. As a church leader, I can only say that I am saddened when I hear about people using rebaptism as a tool to change spouses as often as they change the bedsheets.

If I sense that a person is sincere, that they are willing to confess their responsibility in the failed marriage and their falling away from Christ before the church and be rebaptized, I have not forbidden a remarriage. Maybe they can begin again. If I perform the marriage of someone who divorced, fallen away from God and then returned to Christ, I make it clear to them that I am not guaranteeing their acceptance with God. If their repentance is sincere, I believe God will heal and forgive. But I cannot read hearts. God knows if people are playing some game and deceiving people.

If a believer remarries, can they marry someone who is not a believer?

1 Corinthians 7:39 A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

Believers are only to marry people who also have accepted Christ as their savior. The Bible says they should marry "only in the Lord."

What happens when people have been divorced and are now remarried to an unbeliever? They can look back on their life and see only mistakes and pain and distress. Should they give up in despair? No.

1 Corinthians 7:27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife.

The text is saying stay in the situation you are in. Renew your relationship with Christ today. Confess your sins to God sincerely and He will forgive you. Commit yourself to keeping the law of the Lord for the rest of your life. Make the best of the situation you are in. Are you married with an unbeliever? Be a good spouse. Commit to being a model believer. Show love and respect to them and win them to the faith with your godliness. You can best show your genuine repentance with a maturing faith and practice. People will be influenced more by what you do than what you say. People can see if there is a genuine change in you.

What did Jesus say to the woman caught in adultery? "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." John 8:11.