



Sunday, February 6, 2011: Marriage and Divorce

Scripture: Matthew 5:31-32; 19:1-12

Speaker: Joe Boot

Sermon Notes:

1. Jesus has come to uphold, apply and interpret His law for the lives of His people.
2. God's purpose for human relationships is for sexual purity before marriage and fidelity within marriage.
3. We see the relevance of Jesus' teaching in the context of a culture facing no-fault divorce and marriage breakdown.
4. Marriage is a life-long covenant between a man and a woman, with mutual sexual rights. Divorce is the dissolution of marriage.
5. All the other so-called *unions* are illicit relationships, not real marriage (e.g. homosexual "marriage").
6. Marriage is about a sexual relationship and procreation (Genesis 1-2); it is a covenant before God and society (Malachi 2:14); it implies union and joy (Song of Solomon, Proverbs 5:18-19); it is to be monogamous (1 Corinthians 7:2; 1 Timothy 3:2).
7. Marriage is not eternal, but it is life-long, dissolved by death.
8. God's ideal is monogamy, as taught by example in the creation of marriage in our first parents.
9. Polygamy is always rebellion against God's ideal for marriage. In the Old Testament, polygamy always had negative consequences. It is recorded but never endorsed.
10. Leaders/Kings were forbidden from multiplying wives and set the example for the people (Deut. 17:17).
11. Many believe Matthew 5 and Matthew 19 prohibit divorce for every reason except actual adultery.
12. The word Jesus uses in Matthew 5:32 in Greek is *pornea* and it is distinct from the Greek word for adultery, *moichao*.
13. The church has to deal with the messy situations that were not directly addressed by Moses.
14. Certain crimes in the Mosaic law lead to death, and death always dissolves a marriage (i.e. murder, kidnapping, rape, bestiality); hence Jesus was not restricting the context of divorce to one crime.
15. Divorce it seems is permissible in cases of willful abandonment, including failure to provide, or failure to provide sexual relations, which is a form of harlotry (Judges 19:2). See 1 Corinthians 7:1-15.
16. The context of Jesus' teaching is the Pharisees' practice of sending their wives away at will for trivial offenses. He attacked this as a misinterpretation of the law.
17. In Deuteronomy 24:1-4 there is a recognition that in this fallen order divorce is sometimes necessary to deal with evil.
18. The Pharisees took Deuteronomy 24 as their foundational text for marriage, rather than looking to God's creation pattern.
19. In Isaiah 50:1, we see God divorced Israel for her transgressions.
20. The creation ordinance did not see any ground for divorce, because there was no sin, rebellion, or brokenness.
21. Now, however, fallen people make marriages, and marriage covenants are broken by sins of various kinds.
22. It is because of the hardness of our hearts that divorce became a reality.
23. To deny that we live in a fallen order and claim that there are no grounds for divorce is to assert perfectionism, which is a kind of legalism that leads to destruction in the church and family.
24. The scope of *pornea* is not restricted to adultery, but it includes all sexual immorality, licentiousness (Galatians 5:19-21), uncleanness (Ephesians 5:3-5), incest, prostitution, and radical apostasy (see Revelation 2:21; 14:8; 17:2-4; 18:2-3, 19:2). Some scholars see *porneia* as violation of Mosaic marriage laws. St Paul adds abandonment (material, sexual) as further ground for divorce.
25. The Westminster Confession includes fornication, adultery and willful desertion as lawful grounds for divorce.
26. The innocent spouse may choose to receive back the offending spouse and graciously renew covenant, but is not obligated to do so.
27. To fail to permit people to divorce under the circumstances covered by *pornea* is to rebel against God's law and become legalists.
28. We must not overlook people in our desire to be prescriptive.
29. In Hosea, God gives an example of repeated restoration after adultery.

30. The innocent party in a lawful divorce is free to remarry; the offending party is not.
31. By the grace of God, even those who are guilty of unlawful divorces and remarriages can be restored to the church and right relationship.

Application Questions:

1. What is the biblical definition of marriage? What types of illicit “unions” are excluded?
2. What are the implications of Hebrews 13:4 for God's people?
3. What is divorce? What are biblically lawful grounds for divorce?
4. How might being unequally yoked (2 Cor. 6:14) lead to divorce?
5. How does God view marriage and divorce according to Malachi 2:14-16? What is the significance of the term *covenant*?
6. Where there are no biblical grounds for divorce, what are a believer's marriage obligations to their spouse?
7. How might a couple seek help to restore a struggling marriage?
8. Is there room for restoration and hope where marriage and divorce related sins are followed by real repentance?