

## MATTHEW·DISTILLED (extract the essential elements or most important aspects of)



## CHAPTER (5) SYNOPSIS = Jesus' Sermon On The Mount Address.

## [1.- 8.] DISCUSSED

**9. Consistent with His stated intention of upholding the Law (17-20), Jesus reveals that the customary understanding of six biblical injunctions is inadequate or false and seeks to correct them<sup>1</sup>:**

**9.1. Murder Includes Unrighteous And Unresolved Displays Of Anger Toward A Covenant Brother Or Sister (21-26)**

The capital crime of murder is to also be applied to those who are found guilty of displaying unresolved, unrighteous forms of anger (incl. unwarranted/abusive speech) in relation to their covenant brothers/sisters.

**9.2. Adultery Includes Sexual Acts Expressed By Those Married<sup>2</sup> Toward Someone Other Than Their Spouse (27-30)**

The capital crime of adultery is to also be applied to those who are found guilty of looked upon the nakedness (i.e. naked breast[female], buttocks and genitals) of someone other than their spouse for sexual gratification<sup>3</sup> or have sexually gratified themselves (masturbated) in relation to that individual.

**9.3. Divorce Is Permissible Only In Cases Of Sexual Immorality (31-32)**

9.3.1. **Injunction #3: (31) "It was also said"** = This statement is meant to indicate a connection between the previous injunction (adultery) and the present injunction regarding divorce (i.e. both are concerned/connected to the institution of marriage). Like its predecessors (21, 27), Jesus' words (here) also indicate that the customary view is about to be challenged as false or deficient. And as before, Jesus begins by citing the particular injunction under question. **"Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce"** = This is a paraphrase of (Deu 24:1). To be clear, the legitimacy of divorce as a necessary form of justice in the right circumstances, is not the issue in contention. Both Jesus and the Jews agreed on this. Both were serving a divorced God (Isa 50:1; Jer 3:1, 8)! Where then, Jesus took issue was as to the grounds of divorce (i.e. what qualifies as "indecenty"?). Though there were different schools of thought as to how the word should be interpreted, the majority position or customary view of Jesus' day (i.e. that taught by the Pharisees, the major influencers of Jewish pop-culture in the 1<sup>st</sup> century) allowed for any cause (Mat 19:3)<sup>4</sup>. This essentially represents the current legal position in the United States<sup>5</sup>.

9.3.2. **Jesus' response: (32) "But I say to you (that)"** = Jesus continues to use the rabbinic formula of challenge/correction ("You have heard it said/It was also said" followed by "But I say to you"). By so doing however, what Jesus *does not* do, is place Himself above/outside the Law. In other words, His response (and subsequent correction) is not meant to be taken as a replacement/usurping of the Law itself. No God-respecting Jew would have listened to such a person (since such is the identity of the false teacher – Deu 12:32-13:3). Rather, in accordance w/His promise to "fulfill" the Law, Jesus' aim is one of restoration; bringing the Law back to its original intent or ideal design.

9.3.3. **His corrective instruction: (32) "everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."** = God no longer recognizes as legitimate any divorce which does not have as its reason, "sexual immorality" (πορνεία = a term used in the first century to refer to any/all extra-marital sexual activity -e.g. kissing, fondling, masturbation, oral sex, intercourse, viewing pornography, illicit nakedness, illicit sexual thoughts or conversations, etc.<sup>6</sup>).

<sup>1</sup> "In Matthew, in the sermon on the mount, we find a series of injunctions intended to illustrate the position of Jesus as upholder, not destroyer of the Law." – David Daube (*The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, p.55); "When he says, 'But I say unto you...'. Jesus is seeking to restore the real meaning of the moral law." – Ernest Reisinger (*The Law and the Gospel*)

<sup>2</sup> According to God, those betrothed are also considered to be married (though no yet afforded all the benefits). As such, the prohibition and penalties of adultery in its various forms would equally apply to such people (e.g. Mat 1:18-19).

<sup>3</sup> "Not surprising, disrobing also conveyed erotic intent. To 'see' someone in biblical tales was often tantamount to 'knowing' them sexually and often illicitly." – Eric Silverman (*A Cultural History Of Jewish Dress*, p.8). In this respect consider that in passages such as Eze 16:36; Jer 13:26; Gen 2:25 w/Gen 3:7 uncovered nakedness functions as a euphemism for adultery/sexual immorality. Consider also the fact that rabbis exempted women from stoning for fear that their nakedness would show through their torn garment and men become guilty of adultery (B. Sanhedrin, 44b-45a). Could this be why it is suggested that Tamar be burned instead of stoned (Gen 38:24)?

<sup>4</sup> Josephus, a Pharisee and historian living in the first century wrote, "He that desires to be divorced from his wife for any cause whatsoever (and many such causes happen among men), let him give her assurance that he will never use her as a wife anymore; for by this means she may be at liberty to marry another husband, although before this bill of divorce be given, she is not permitted so to do (*Antiquities*, IV, 253)". Josephus obviously believed what he wrote since he divorced his wife on the basis of nothing more than "bad behavior" ("I divorced my wife, as not pleased with her behavior...". [*Life*, 426]). In like manner, the well-known Jewish source, the book of Sirach/Ecclesiasticus (2<sup>nd</sup> cent.. B.C.) stated, "If your wife go not as you would have her, cut her off from your flesh and give her a bill of divorce and let her go (*S/E* 25:26)." According to the school of Rabbi Hillel, "indecenty" included spoiling a meal or finding someone else you desired more.

<sup>5</sup> All 50 states have adopted a no-fault position in relation to divorce. As such, the grounds on which a divorce can be granted are greatly expanded to include almost any reason as long it can be established under the broad terms of one of the following: irretrievable breakdown of the marriage, irreconcilable differences, or incompatibility.

<sup>6</sup> "In both the ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts, sexual immorality would have included any kind of sexual activity between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman... Πορνεία was a catch-all word used to reference any kind of sexual activity outside the bounds of proper sexual conduct. In Paul's day avoiding πορνεία would have entailed avoiding any kind of sexual activity – even light sexual activity – between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman...When the biblical authors wrote, 'Abstain from sexual immorality,' their hearers knew exactly what they meant. In the first century context, appropriate conduct meant treating members of the opposite sex in a completely non-sexual way. – Gerald Hiestand ("Biblical-Theological Approach To Premarital Sexual Ethics: Or, What Would Paul Say About Making Out," *Bulletin of Ecclesiastical Theology*)

Any marriage dissolved w/o this as its grounds, is therefore seen by God as still intact. In other words, though they may be viewed as divorced by society, God still views them as husband and wife (L. “*coram hominibus contra coram Deo*” = before men versus before God). As such, their marital union to somebody else makes them guilty of “adultery”<sup>7</sup>.

#### 9.3.4. Why Jesus’ actions in limiting the scope of permissible/legitimate divorce to sexual immorality alone reflects a restoration of the Law to its original intent or ideal design (Mat 19:1-9):

9.3.4.1. God’s purpose in establishing the marriage covenant was the creation of heterosexual, monogamous relationships (4-6 = “**He who created from the beginning made them male and female... Therefore a man and his wife** [marriage is one man and one woman]”) that are sexually exclusive and lifelong (5-6 = “**a man... shall hold fast** [be devoted] **to his wife and the two shall become one flesh** [figure of speech referring to monogamous sexual activity – e.g. 1Co 6:15-20]. **So they are no longer two but one flesh** [Their devotion to others sexually has ended. It exists now only between them]. **What therefore God has joined together** [in covenant], **let no man separate** [the covenant includes no option allowing the parties involved to terminate it. It is instead to be viewed as permanent/lifelong]”). As such, only a direct failure/violation in relation to the stated purpose (of the covenant) can offer the remedy of early release (i.e. divorce) to either party.<sup>8</sup>

*That this view on divorce is indeed the conclusion Jesus is drawing (from His reference to Genesis 1 and 2), is made clear by the Pharisees response in (7) = IOW: Why did Moses establish a much larger scope (i.e. “indecency” – Deu 24:1) than simply those things which represent a direct violation of the marriage covenant’s purpose?*

9.3.4.2. Indecency/any cause as grounds for divorce was a concession (i.e. granting material value to something immaterial/no value) permitted until the time of reformation and empowerment (8 = “**Because of your hardness of heart**” [figure of speech referring to obstinacy/stubbornness of the will and reflects the spiritual condition of all of those before the time of reformation- i.e. the NC age of empowerment and freedom from such stubbornness – e.g. Mar 16:14; Deu 9:27 w/10:16; Heb 9:8-9; Rom 7:18, 8:1-9. As such, the term refers to all OT believers – those whose help in living for God would come through concession rather than HS possession] **Moses allowed you to divorce your wives** [The form of divorce est’d in Deu 24 was a concession of condescension<sup>9</sup> not compromise. God does not wear out, wear down, give in, sell out or prescribe anything that w/b sin – Isa 40:28, 42:4, 48:8-11. Other examples of concessions of condescension would include polygamy and the OC cleans laws as justification. In both cases, God honors something – which in reality, does not possess real/full value – additional wives were not loved/nor valued the same as the first wife; animal sacrifices could not remove sin, Gen 29:30-31; Heb 10:1-4]<sup>10</sup>, **but from the beginning it was not so** [Such concessions were not God’s original intent for divorce]”<sup>11</sup>.

9.3.4.3. Sexual immorality is the only direct violation/failure in relation to the marriage covenant and therefore represents the only truly material grounds for divorce (9).

#### 9.3.5. Closing Theological/Pastoral/Practical Thoughts:

9.3.5.1. Christians who file for illegitimate divorces w/b held responsible as accomplices to adultery (a capital crime) since (according again to Jesus) this is what they are “making” their former spouse commit (Mat 5:32 – “makes” = present tense).

9.3.5.2. God expects a person to suffer through a difficult (even abusive) marriage (out of honor for Him), rather than file for an illegitimate (and sinful) divorce (1Pe 3:1-2).

9.3.5.3. Like all crimes, sexual immorality (as permissible grounds) must be proven by evidence (to the Church) before divorce is granted (by the Church/by God) (Deu 17:6; Mat 16:19).

9.3.5.4. A Christian in an abusive situation can seek separation (but not divorce) until such separation creates infidelity (1Co 7:3, 10-12).

9.3.5.5. Legitimate divorces are honored by God as a means of protecting the innocent and punishing the guilty. It also frees the persons to remarriage (Deu 24:1-2; 1Co 7:27-28).

<sup>7</sup> Craig Keener writes, “Jesus is declaring that God does not accept [illegitimate] divorce, hence a divorced woman remains married to her first husband and her marriage is adulterous. Precisely because the term for legal divorce meant ‘freedom to remarry, everyone understood that a woman without a valid certificate of divorce was not free to remarry. Jesus declares that if God does not accept the divorce as valid, remarriage is adulterous...because in God’s sight the original couple remains married.” (*Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, p.190). B.J. Malina and R.L. Rohrbaugh suggest that, “a husband ‘makes her an adulteress’ because one offers her for sexual union with other males and thus acts as a pimp (which is how ancient law viewed a man who retained, hence tolerated, an adulterous wife).” (*Social Science Commentary On The Synoptic Gospels*, p.53)

<sup>8</sup> Permissible divorce is available to women as well as men (Mar 10:12).

<sup>9</sup> Accommodation due to an inferior state (e.g. sippy cups for small children).

<sup>10</sup> As it re: to when this divorce concession was put in place, see Gen 20:10-12 - “cast out” – literally “send away” or “divorce”. To my knowledge, this is the 1<sup>st</sup> recorded divorce in the Bible. It is obvious, this concession of “any cause” is already in place [since otherwise God would never have approved]. In this case, it is Sarah’s jealousy.

<sup>11</sup> Though Jesus never challenges the Pharisees’ understanding of Moses’ prescription in Deu 24:1 (“indecency” as “any cause” – verse 3), it becomes easily discernible that there were exceptions (e.g. Mal 2:10-16). Any cause (or indecency) was therefore never meant to function as a catch-all reason for ending a marriage. Most likely it was a provision given exclusively to the man and covered only things (in the wife) which would constitute faithlessness/failure in relation to her wifely duties (e.g. insubordination, sterility, etc.).