

Sermon Notes for October 31, 1999

**The Sermon on the Mount
“Biblical Grounds for Divorce”
Matthew 5:31-32
& I Corinthians 7:10-16**

Opening Joke - What about the horse?

Six ways to learn everything you ever need to know about a man before you decide to marry him: **1)** Watch him drive in heavy traffic. **2)** Play tennis with him. **3)** Listen to him talk to his mother when he doesn't know you're listening. **4)** See how he treats those who serve him (waiters, maids). **5)** Notice what he's willing to spend his money to buy. **6)** Look at his friends. And if you still can't make up your mind, then look at his shoes. A man who keeps his shoes in good repair generally tends to the rest of his life too.

She answered the phone to hear a repentant voice. “I’m sorry, darling,” he said. “I have thought things over and you can have the Rolls-Royce as a wedding present. We will move to the Gold Coast, and your mother can stay with us. **Now will you marry me?**” **“Of course I will,” she said. “And who is this speaking?”**

Introduction

A. Statistics Don't Lie

1. The growth of divorce in the U.S.
 - a. **1940** - 264,000 divorces a year in the U.S. (1 of 7)
 - b. **1960** - 393,000 divorces a year in the U.S. (1 of 4)
 - c. **1970** - 715,000 divorces a year in the U.S. (1 of 3)
 - d. **1997** - 1,163,000 divorces a year in the U.S. (1 of 2)
(from ¼ to 1 million divorces in 50 years.)
2. Percentages regarding divorce/marriage in the U.S.
 - a. **United States**
49% of marriages to divorce in
1996 (2,344,000/1,150,000) and
1997 (2,384,000/1,163,000)
 - b. **Tennessee** -
42% in 1996 (82,064/34,412) and
38% in 1997 (76,531/29,459)
 - c. **Mississippi** -
74% in 1996 (21,340/15,697) and
63% in 1997 (21,976/13,844)

(* Why do toy makers watch the divorce rate? When it rises, so do sales.)

B. Grounds for Divorce in Tennessee:

1. Adultery
2. Habitual drunkenness or abuse of narcotic drugs that has worsened since the marriage
3. Willful or malicious desertion for one (1) full year without a reasonable cause
4. Conviction of a felony and sentencing to the penitentiary or conviction of an infamous crime
5. Pregnancy of the wife by another before the marriage without the husband's knowledge
6. Willful refusal to move to Tennessee with your spouse and living apart for two years
7. Malicious attempt upon the life of the other
8. Lack of reconciliation for two (2) years after the entry of a decree of separate maintenance
9. Impotency and sterility
10. Bigamy
11. Living separately and apart for two (2) years with no minor children
12. Cruel and inhuman treatment (which may also be referred to as "inappropriate marital conduct")
13. Indignities offered by one spouse to the other
14. Abandonment of the wife in which the husband refuses or neglects to provide for her

C. My Experience With Marriage And Divorce

1. Don Patterson said to me that he was placed in his most difficult situations as a Pastor by the weddings that he was asked to do.
2. Me
 - a. 6'5" man who didn't want to hear my comments on divorce.
 - b. K.F. - Three times married - could be a deacon.
 1. First marriage - wrong grounds, she remarried.
 2. Second marriage - she was unfaithful.
 3. Third marriage - he was free and she was once divorced because her mate was unfaithful.
 - c. Couple
 1. He unmarried.
 2. She divorced because of spouse being unfaithful.
 3. I saw nothing to prevent their marriage - they were married within a month.

D. The Church's Problem With Divorce

1. Three Views
 - a. There is **NO** ground for divorce.
 - b. There is **ANY** ground for divorce and remarriage.
 - c. There are **CERTAIN** grounds for divorce and remarriage.
2. **WHATEVER** our views, divorce is **NOT** the unpardonable sin.

I. The View Of Divorce In THE DAYS OF JESUS

A. The View of the GREEKS.

1. The Greeks were perhaps the most liberal in the area of divorce.
 - a. Wives were seen as insignificant.
 - b. Relationships outside of marriage carried no stigma whatsoever.
 1. While the Greeks DEMANDED absolute purity on the part of their wives,
 2. husbands were allowed and expected to have extramarital relationships.
 3. Cicero said that relationships outside of marriage were the ordinary and conventional thing.
 4. Socrates - "Is there anyone to whom you entrust more serious matters than to your wife, and is there anyone to whom you talk less?"
 - c. Divorce required no legal process whatsoever.
 1. All that was required in a Greek divorce was that the man would dismiss his wife in the presence of two witnesses.
 2. All the husband legally had to do was to return her dowry intact.
2. The Greek system was built entirely on relationships OUTSIDE of marriage.

B. The View of the ROMANS

1. The Romans were highly committed to the family; to the Romans, the home was everything.
 - a. The Roman wife was not demeaned like the Greek wife.
 - b. Extra-marital affairs were disdained and prostitutes were held in contempt.
 - c. So high was the standard of Roman morality that for the first 500 years of their history, there was not one single case of a divorce recorded (234 B.C.)
2. But then came the Greeks . . .
 - a. Despite the fact that the Roman conquered the Greeks, the Greek philosophy of life permeated Roman thinking and lifestyle.
 - b. By the Second Century B.C., divorce became as common as marriage.
 1. A woman who had eight husbands in five years.
 2. A woman who had ten husbands.
 3. Woman at the well - John 4 - Five husbands.
 - c. Romans jest - "Marriage brings only two happy days - the day when the husband first clasps his wife to himself, and the day when he lays her in the tomb."
 - d. Taxes were levied on the unmarried, and special privileges were given to those who had children to attempt to rescue the institution of marriage.

C. The View of the JEWS

1. There was no time in history that the marriage and the family stood in greater peril of destruction than in the days when Jesus came into the world.

- a. The Jews as well as Jesus helped stem the tide against the collapse of the home.
- b. The Jews certainly did their part.
- 2. But the Jews had an INTERESTING viewpoint.
 - a. They DID have a Biblical background.
 - 1. Malachi 2:16 - “God hates divorce.”
 - 2. 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 . . .”
 - a. Before Moses, a man could divorce his wife for any and every reason, but Moses required a certificate to prove the grounds for divorce.
 - b. However, the Jews differed on these grounds.
 - b. They had a Biblical misunderstanding - Two schools of thought.
 - 1. **The School of Shammai** - very conservative
 - a. Read Deuteronomy 24 very literally - that some indecency was sexual in nature ONLY.
 - b. Divorce could only take place because of an unclean act of a spouse.
 - 2. **The School of Hillel** - more liberal
 - a. The School of Hillel interpreted “some indecency” with more “options” - if a wife . . .
 - 1. spoiled the dinner with too much salt.
 - 2. went into public with her head uncovered.
 - 3. talked disrespectfully of her husband in public.
 - 4. was not as attractive as another man’s wife.
 - b. And the certificate could be given in the presence of two witnesses. **“Let this be from me your writ of divorce and letter of dismissal and deed of liberation, that you may marry whatsoever man you will.”**

II. The View of Divorce BY JESUS

A. Jesus Responds To Their Schools.

- 1. In **Matthew 19:13**, the Pharisees attempted to find out Jesus’ position on divorce as well as His stand on the two schools of Shammai and Hillel - **“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”**
 - a. Notice that Jesus does not mention the two schools.
 - b. Instead He simply refers to their view , “It has been said, anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.”
 - 1. He identifies with Deuteronomy 24.
 - 2. He attacks their interpretation of Deuteronomy 24.
- 2. But Jesus once again is going to give an ORIGINAL MEANING as already taught in Deuteronomy 24, something they ALL had missed.

B. Jesus Teaches “His School” On Divorce.

- 1. The **GROUNDS** for divorce

Vs. 32: “But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, **except for marital unfaithfulness . . .**“

- a. Marital unfaithfulness by definition
 1. **FIRST** of all, we must realize that the Old Testament law required that a person caught in adultery would be stoned.
 - a. So this word does not mean the physical act of adultery.
 - b. It is much, much deeper than that.
 2. **SECOND**, the word for marital unfaithfulness was all inclusive.
 - a. What marital unfaithfulness **WAS**:
 1. The Definition
 - a. the Greek word porneia
 - b. from which we get the word pornography
 - c. an evil, sexual thing
 - d. incest, prostitution, homosexuality, bestiality.
 2. The Application
 - a. It actually meant an unclean act.
 - b. Sins of nakedness
 - c. **ANYTHING** that was done sexually with one who is not your spouse.
 - b. What marital unfaithfulness **WAS NOT**:
 1. Notice that Jesus mentioned **NOTHING** about:
 - a. abuse
 - b. neglect
 - c. alienation of affection
 - d. irreconcilable differences
 2. **JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF** says that the only grounds for divorce is a sexual act of one of the spouses.
 - b. Marital unfaithfulness was sexual.
2. **The IMPACT of divorce**

Vs. 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.**”

- a. In fact, if a person gets a divorce **OTHER THAN** this ground of sexuality;
 1. **THEY HAVE NO GROUNDS.**
 2. **THEY ARE IN DANGER OF ADULTERY.**
 - a. If a person gets divorced for a reason **OTHER** than unfaithfulness, they are in danger of living in adultery, if they remarry.
 - b. However, if a person **DOES** divorce over unfaithfulness, they are free to remarry -

1. In fact, if your spouse is guilty of unfaithfulness, you, as the innocent party are free to pursue the divorce and to remarry.
2. I would caution you about a one time fling as opposed to the consistent abuse of adultery (an affair)
 - a. I have counseled people TO GET A DIVORCE in a marriage where there was continual unfaithfulness,
 - b. but have begged couples to stay together on a one time mistake. (Illustration of a couple)

III. The View of Divorce BY PAUL

A. The Divorce Of BELIEVERS WITH BELIEVERS

I Corinthians 7:10-11 - “To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.”

1. Paul gives the OTHER ground for divorce in I Corinthians 7.

- a. Notice that Paul says that the Lord Jesus has ALREADY addressed this issue in Matthew 5 and 19.

1. Believers are NOT to get a divorce EXCEPT for marital unfaithfulness.
2. Jesus has made this teaching clear.

- b. Paul re-teaches this truth, but adds to it what believers should do IF they DO get a divorce.

1. Even though the only ground for believers to get divorced is marital unfaithfulness,

2. **if two believers do get a divorce, THEY ARE TO REMAIN UNMARRIED.**

- a. FIRST of all, these believers have DISOBEYED Jesus’ own teaching about divorce - they are in danger of committing adultery if they remarry without proper grounds.
- b. But SECONDLY, they have been a poor witness to the Gospel by their divorce.
- c. And THIRDLY, they should not marry another so that they can REMARRY one another - after all, God in His Word has called Christian couples
 1. to marry in the Lord
 2. to leave, cleave and become one flesh
 3. UNTIL GOD PUTS THEM ASUNDER - Matt. 19:6 - “Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate.”

2. But there is yet one other area.

B. The Divorce of BELIEVERS WITH UNBELIEVERS

1. Why would a believer marry an unbeliever? Paul was very clear in **II Corinthians 6:14: “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.”**
 - a. A believer may have been disobedient and married an unbeliever against the clear teaching of Scriptures.
 - b. Two unbelievers got married and one of the spouses became a Christian.
 - c. A believer THOUGHT that he/she was marrying a believer, but the so-called “believer” left the faith.
2. **How are believers in these situations supposed to live?**
 - a. **A believer has married an unbeliever**
 1. DESPITE the fact that a believer married an unbeliever, THIS IS NOT the unpardonable sin.
 2. Divorcing your unbelieving spouse would be ANOTHER SIN!
 3. YOU ARE MARRIED and your spouse deserves EVERYTHING that marriage holds for them
 - a. You may not have the spiritual together -
 1. But you can PRAY FOR THEM
 2. AND DON’T PREACH AT THEM!
 3. Look at I Peter 3
 4. Read “Beloved Unbeliever” by Jo Berry
 - b. You can have a great emotional relationship
 1. That spouse NEEDS you.
 2. DON’T WITHDRAW emotionally.
 3. Be as involved in their life as if they were a Christian.
 - c. Don’t back off physically.
 1. THIS IS NOT what Paul meant when he said do not be unequally yoked.
 - a. You are already yoked
 - b. Now, be the best wife you can be.
 2. My experience with believing women
 - a. They fear unequally yoked.
 - b. You can:
 1. Drive a man crazy by withholding sexual relations with him.
 2. Bring him to Christ BECAUSE of sexual relations.
 - b. **Two unbelievers got married and one of the spouses becomes a Christian**
 1. You are STILL married.
 2. He or she married you BECAUSE they loved YOU!
 3. Be aware that your change will scare them to death!

4. Put yourself in THEIR situation - How would you want to be approached?
- c. **What about divorce when living with an unbeliever?**
 1. **REMAIN IN THE MARRIAGE!**
I Corinthians 7:12: “”To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her.”
 - a. You, as the Christian, are NEVER to initiate divorce from your unbelieving spouse - WHY?
 - b. You, as a Christian, have a GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY, to be a blessing to your spouse and your children
 1. by your prayers
 2. by your life
 3. by your Godly attitude
 4. They may come to Christ BECAUSE OF YOU!
 5. Have you considered that YOU may be the AGENT God uses to lead your spouse to Christ!
 2. **Remain in the marriage UNTIL YOUR UNBELIEVING SPOUSE WANTS OUT.**
I 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.”
 - a. If, however, your unbelieving spouse wants out, LET THEM GO!
 1. I have seen Christian wives REFUSE to grant a divorce to their unbelieving spouse because they believed that they could save their husbands.
 2. The believing spouse is NOT to prevent the unbeliever from leaving.
 - b. And after that, the believer is free to remarry.

To Sum Up

1. **THERE ARE TWO BIBLICAL GROUNDS FOR DIVORCE**
 - a. **Jesus’ ground for divorce - sexual unfaithfulness**
 1. If your spouse is guilty of a sexual sin,
 - a. you, as the innocent party are free to sue for divorce

- b. and free to remarry.
 - 2. That marriage is over.
 - b. **Paul's ground for divorce - separation**
 - 1. If two believers unbiblically divorce, then they are to remain unmarried with a view toward remarriage
 - 2. If a believer is married to an unbeliever and the unbeliever wants a divorce,
 - a. the believer is to let them go.
 - b. the believer is free to remarry.
2. **If you have divorced unbiblically and even remarried, what SHOULD YOU DO?**
- a. Let me remind you, divorce is NOT the unpardonable sin!
 - b. Unbiblical divorce can be forgiven just like any other sin.
 - 1. But you must confess it to the Lord
 - 2. Repent and be forgiven.
 - c. DON'T SEEK a divorce to "fix it!"
 - 1. Instead, commit yourself FULLY to the one with whom you are married.
 - 2. Despite your sin, God is sovereign and He will use the entire situation to His glory.
3. **Our focus needs to be upon marriage and not divorce.**
- a. John Stott says that as a counselor, he never talks to a couple about divorce until he has talked to them about:
 - 1. marriage from God's view
 - 2. reconciliation.
 Only after that does he regretfully talk about divorce.
4. **Don't be absolutely discouraged:**
- Ninety percent of American couples have had only one sexual partner since they were married
 - Four-fifths say they would marry the same person if they had to do it over again.
 - Over 80 percent of all married men, regardless of age, say their wife is good-looking.
 - Three-quarters of married people say their spouse is their best friend.
 - Three-quarters of those questioned say divorce is "not at all likely."
 - Over 60 percent of American couples describe their marriage as "very happy."

The answer to divorce is Jesus.

5. A young wife came to me several years ago to ask what the Bible taught about divorce. She concluded she had no alternative except to divorce her husband. I pointed out that she did have an alternative: the soft heart promised by God through Ezekiel's inspired pen. **Divorce is the result of hardened hearts, and it can be overcome by the antidote of the softened heart.**
- "Where do I get a soft heart?" she asked, and I had the joy of pointing her to Christ.**

Some months later her husband came to me and said, “I don’t know what’s happened to her, but I do know that whatever it is, I want it. **She’s told me something about a new heart. Can I have one?**”

I said, **“Let’s see if we can get you fitted.”** God gave him a new heart, and he became a new man. The spirit of God brought those two back together, and theirs is a happy, productive marriage today.

6. Enough to make you mine -

“Come into the living room, children. We have something to tell you.”

That’s how our parents told us they were not going to be together anymore.

After they told us they were divorcing, I sat under the table and my mind replayed again and again the words my father said. I didn’t know then what it all meant, but I soon learned. After Dad left, I looked through the drawers where he kept his clothes and found an old sweat shirt he left behind. I hid it in my room and kept it for years. I would cling to it when I was lonely for him. My father came back to see us a few times, but his visits became less and less frequent. Finally his visits stopped completely. I always wondered where he went. I wondered if he thought about us very much. I hoped that he did. But I guess I’ll never know.”