



Sermon on the Mount Series Week 5 - Divorce & Truth-telling

Matthew 5:31-37

June 23, 2024 - Pastor Rafael Aristy

Matthew 5:31-32 NIV 31 "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' 32 But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

PR's opening thoughts: Divorce is a difficult topic for some. This message today is not prescriptive. This message is not going to tell you what you **MUST** do in your relationship because we don't know your situation or your struggle; we don't know the depth of your relationship with Jesus or your ability to hear the voice of Holy Spirit.

- So, don't put words in my mouth or attribute to me words that come solely from your interpretation of what I say.

- You can listen to the podcast this week to hear my firsthand experience with divorce in my life.

Divorce is one of those words that illicit an emotional response for a lot of us. Maybe you feel anger, fear, sadness, shame, regret, guilt, confusion, loss, or even relief. You may have, or be experiencing, more than one of these emotions at the same time.

In the Church, well-meaning leaders and church members may have hurt someone contemplating or experiencing divorce with their words/advice forgetting that **divorce is about people!** It is not about an issue, but about real people with real feelings whose lives have been shattered, whom the Father loves, and we should love in the same way.

Divorce in the Bible is not as **CLEAR** as we may think/want it to be. It is a complicated topic that creates controversy, not only in our day and age, but also in Jesus' day.

Out of the 613 laws given by God in the Torah (Law), **only 2 said anything about divorce.** And even those 2 didn't address it directly.

- We have stated some pretty strong words about divorce in the Church as a whole (not just at Good News but the worldwide church). Does this understanding about the words we have in the

Bible affect your attitude toward how you may "treat" or "judge" people who have experienced divorce?

-How do we best represent Jesus and His upside-down kingdom when we have debates on what scripture means?

Matthew 5:31-32 is not the only time Jesus talks about divorce in Matthew's gospel account. There's a story in **Matthew 19** that sheds some light onto what Jesus says in our text for today.

Matthew 19:3 NIV "Some Pharisees came to him *to test him*. They asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife *for any and every reason?*' "

Who asked the question? Pharisees. What was the intent of the question? To test Jesus. WHY? There was an open debate amongst the scholars/teachers of the law. As soon as Jesus answers this topic, He will be placed into one of 2 camps. The Pharisees are trying to get Jesus to "pick a side." This was a controversial topic THEN, and it still is TODAY.

The 2 different sides in the argument in Jesus day were because of 2 different interpretations of the same command:

- The House (side) of Shammai - A man can divorce his wife ONLY because of sexual immorality.
- The House (side) of Hillel - A man can divorce his wife for ANY cause.

-These types of debates over scripture are nothing new. How do we best handle them before God as His image bearers to the world?

Both of these views/the debate came from the interpretation of **Deuteronomy 24:1-4**
"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,² and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, ³ and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, ⁴ then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the Lord. Do not bring sin upon the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance."

The debate was how does one interpret "**becomes displeasing**" due to "**something indecent**" in verse 1?

The House of Shammai interpreted it as sexual immorality, while the House of Hillel interpreted it as if your wife can't cook, etc. and has become displeasing to you.

Remember that the Bible was not written in English, and there's much more depth to the Hebrew words. The phrase in the Hebrew Bible is **ervat dhvar**. **Ervat means "nakedness" and dhvar means "word" or "thing."** Scholar Tim Mackey interprets this phrase "nakedness of a matter" or

"nakedness of a thing." To complicate matters further, this phrase doesn't appear in any other part of Torah or in the Hebrew Bible.

We use phrases in the English language that if someone does not understand of our English context would be a problem. For example "*Rafael came NAKED* before the congregation as he revealed his struggles with divorce." Means different than the basic definition of "naked."

This little phrase **ervat dhvar** is what the rabbis and teachers of the law are wrestling over how to interpret. It was a difficult and dense phrase, interpreted in many ways, and is a challenge for them who understood the language and the cultural context. In the same way, it is a challenge to us today.

Back to the question in **Matthew 19** where Jesus responds to the Pharisees... **Matthew 19:4-9 NIV**
4 "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' (Genesis 1:27) 5 and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and *the two will become one flesh*'? (Genesis 2:24) 6 So they are no longer two, *but one flesh*. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." 7 "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" 8 Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives *because your hearts were hard*. But it was not *this way from the beginning*. 9 I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, *except for sexual immorality*, and marries another woman commits adultery."

Jesus is reminding them of their history and explaining that marriage is a covenant, just like the covenants of the past between God and man. And he explains what that covenant looks like and clarifies that sexual immorality breaks that covenant. Jesus explains that God's intention was for couples to become ONE flesh (Genesis 2), which is to **live in a covenant of oneness with each other and with God**.

- Have you ever tried to separate YOU from YOU?! It is impossible!

God is about Covenant, but we are not good at that. God is about COVENANT LOYALTY, but we are unfaithful and disloyal, always looking for a way out. We can not be trusted because we break trust. We break vows. This is precisely the reason Jesus had to come in the form of a man. He fulfilled the covenant.

- Consider a discussion/personal study on covenant. What it means, the covenants of God with man, etc.

The Pharisees asked Jesus... 7 "' Why then,' they asked, 'did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?' 8 Jesus replied, 'Moses permitted you to divorce your wives *because your hearts were hard*. But it was not *this way from the beginning*.' "

God is about *covenant* but we are not good at that. God is about covenant loyalty, but *we are unfaithful* and disloyal, always looking for a way out. This is *precisely the reason Jesus had to come* in the form of a man. *He fulfilled the covenant*.

Jesus tells them that it was “because of your hardened hearts” that Moses permitted divorce. **Divorce only BECAME AN OPTION because of our sinful desires.** Divorce was not God’s plan...Just like SIN wasn’t part of his plan...Just like suffering wasn’t part of it...Just like DEATH wasn’t part of the plan! But we want a way out of hard things, including marriage. Sometimes in our culture, we choose divorce like we choose a new pair of shoes...This was NOT God’s original design or His desire.

So, what about physical abuse?...Emotional/mental abuse?...What about substance abuse?...What about lies, lies, and more lies? We all want someone, especially our pastors, to give us a very cut and dry answer of what is grounds for divorce and what is not, but neither Jesus nor the Torah (the law) was super specific.

There’s some things we don’t really know, but there’s somethings we DO KNOW. The Bible doesn’t use the word abuse, but it uses the word **oppressed** a lot! Oppressed means crushing or burdening someone by the abuse of power or authority. We know by reading the Bible that **Jesus is ALWAYS on the side of the oppressed, the marginalized, and the disenfranchised!**

Malachi 2:13-16 NIV 13 “Another thing you do: You flood the Lord’s altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer looks with favor on your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. 14 You ask, ‘Why?’ It is because the Lord is the witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.”

- God is for the oppressed.

Sexual immorality in marriage breaks trust and relationship. So does abuse and oppression.

- What thoughts or feelings have arisen as you hear this message on divorce?

- Is there anything you need to process with Jesus or with your group to bring healing to this area of divorce, whether it is you or others around you who have faced it?

Jesus transitions now to oaths and vows, right after He has spoken on marriage, the epitome of vows and oaths.

Matthew 5:33-37 NIV 33 “Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.’ 34 But I tell you, do not swear an oath 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 All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.”

Once again Jesus is going after something that had become normal in His culture. By the time of Jesus, out of respect for God, the Israelites would not even pronounce the name of Yahweh (the

personal name for God) anymore. They would never swear by "God" so they would swear by things that are closely associated to Yahweh. *Why is this a big deal?* Because this approach of swearing by things associated with God is based on manipulating people in order to get your way, trying to have your words seem more weighty. It is about trying to manipulate people into believing and accepting what you're saying.

"The essence of swearing oaths that Jesus targets here is about invoking something or someone else, especially God, to make your words seem more significant and more weighty. The aim is to impress others with your seriousness, or your piety, so that you get what you want. It's a device of manipulation designed to override the judgment or input of others in order to possess them for our purposes. It's manipulation, or as we say in our culture, spin. And Jesus says it is evil. Instead of loving and honoring others with truthfulness, the intent is to get one's way by verbal manipulation of the thoughts and choices of others."

-Dallas Willard author of Divine Conspiracy

Have you ever heard people say, "The Lord told me to _____?" What can you say to that? Who am I to go against you, if GOD HIMSELF spoke to you? I'm not saying God doesn't speak, but I am saying that just as they did then, we use the "God card" to manipulate others.

A vow in the Bible is a promise to God. **An oath** in the Bible is between humans. It is a synonym for **covenant** like we spoke of earlier. This is all about trust and relationship. If I have to manipulate you to trust me, there's a problem. If I make an oath in order to take advantage of you, there's a problem!

Jesus tells us what that problem is:

V. 37 "All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."

Some translations say, "let your yes be yes, and your no be no." Jesus' words here are critical in understanding the big picture of using words to manipulate others. Anything beyond the truth and an honest "yes" and "no" comes from satan. Satan uses manipulation and lies to override the judgement of others, in order to get his way.

For example: Genesis 3:1 NIV "Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

Manipulation means "to begin to cause doubt or confusion." Satan does this so that his words would carry more weight. Manipulation is part of his tactic! **When we use manipulation** in order to try to control someone else, we are using something that comes from the evil one! This is satan's nature, this is who he is, and it has no room in the life of a follower of Jesus.

Let your YES be YES, and your NO be NO! Be trustworthy people. Be faithful people. Be people who are loyal to the covenant you've made. REMEMBER that how you live reflects the name of Jesus. BE PEOPLE OF YOUR WORD!

- There is a standard. As believers we are to be different from the world. But we do not have to do it alone. He gives us biblical community if we will allow it. For example, we share our marriage vows in front of our community of witnesses. They are to be part of that community that helps us live different from the world. Do you have that kind of community?
- Going to group does not necessarily mean you have community. Explain the difference.
- Thinking of the role of witnesses/community at a wedding, does this thought make you recognize the value of those witnessing the ceremony? Does it make you think differently about your role as a guest at a marriage ceremony?

Marriage is a covenant. It's a relational agreement before God that requires COMMITMENT, FAITHFULNESS, HUMILITY, selflessness, and LOYALTY. It's not to be entered into lightly. Some just wanna get married, chose their flavor, and after marriage, THEN ask God to bless it. Some get married prematurely, find themselves in a hell of their own making... We can not take the decisions lightly, thinking we can just divorce if it doesn't work.

Telling the truth with our words is vital in marriage and any human relationship. We are to represent Christ so our words and actions must not be manipulative or self-serving. The honest truth of our words is their weight. No manipulation or "swearing" to make them carry weight. Let our yes be yes and our no be no in all things, no matter what.

- How do our words affect our marriages?
- Married or not, what areas of your life are influenced by the honesty of your words?
- Do you feel tempted to have to "swear" by your words to make them carry more weight?
- Look into the deeper study portion below and study these verses. How do they need to be applied to your life right now? Ask the Lord to give you insight and understanding of His Word. Ask Him to help you see areas you may need to give some extra attention to in your life in light of the truth of these scriptures.
- What do you learn about God through this portion of scripture that we studied today?
- What do you learn about yourself through this portion of scripture?
- What do you recognize about your interaction with others in light of this portion of scripture?
- Is there any action you need to take this week in light of your study of this scripture today?

Deeper study:

Marriage: The Bible depicts the relationship between Jesus and the church as a marriage. Jesus is the groom and the church is the bride.

Revelation 19:7-9 NIV 7 "Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; 8 it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. 9 And the angel

said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."

Oaths and Vows

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

Deuteronomy 23:21-23 NIV 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. 22 But if you refrain from making a vow, you will not be guilty. 23 Whatever your lips utter you must be sure to do, because you made your vow freely to the Lord your God with your own mouth."

Matthew 23:16-22 NIV 16 "Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gold of the temple is bound by that oath.' 17 You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? 18 You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gift on the altar is bound by that oath.' 19 You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? 20 Therefore, anyone who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. 21 And anyone who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. 22 And anyone who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it."