

LIFE. DIFFERENT.

WHAT IF **GOD** TOOK OVER?

Raising The Bar: Honor Your Vows

The “Hard sayings of Jesus”

- Statements in which Jesus corrects cultural and religious perceptions of the what it means to live for God.
- He raises the bar beyond religious piety and societal ethics to the holy ways of the Kingdom life...

Matthew 5:31

³¹ “It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’”

Jesus is quoting a common rabbinical teaching about divorce.

The source of this rabbinical rule was **Deuteronomy 24:1-4.**

But as Jesus often points out, their interpretations were rarely God’s intended application...

Matthew 5:32

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.

The rabbinical teaching on divorce leads to adultery, directly violating one of God's 10 cardinal commandments!

A Culture That Devalues Marriage...

- In our media presentation of marriage
- In our cultural definition of marriage
- In our societal abandonment of marriage as the paramount of romantic relationships
- And in our personal malpractice of the marriage covenant within the church...

These issues of divorce and adultery are being played out all around us, and among us.

So what exactly is God saying, and what do we do about it?

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Matthew 19:3-6

³ *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?”*

⁴ *“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’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’?⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”*

Matthew 19:7-9

- 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.”*

Matthew 19:3

“Is it lawful...to divorce...for any and every reason?”

They are referring to one of two popular interpretations of the rabbinical law and the passage in Deuteronomy referred to in chapter 5...

Two schools of rabbinical thought:

1 - The School of Shammai

- More conservative
- Taught that divorce is only permissible on grounds of unchastity (sexual sin)

2 - The School of Hillel

- More liberal
- It was taught that divorce is permissible for “any and every reason”
- A man could divorce his wife for the most minor reasons (poor cooking, physical attraction, etc.)

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...and sends her from his house....then [he] is not allowed to marry her again...”*

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This disagreement between interpretations arose over the meaning of the term “indecent”

- The literal meaning of the Hebrew word used here is “the nakedness of a thing”
- It is only used one other place in all of Scripture, and seems to mean anything that is “improper, shameful, or indecent”

The Pharisees are basically asking Jesus which interpretation is correct...

“Is divorce only permitted on grounds of sexual sin... or can a man, before God, sinlessly divorce his wife for nothing more than burning his dinner...?”

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Jesus' answer: "Neither!"

Matthew 19:4-6

⁴ "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' 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'? ⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

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Jesus tells them that marriages were never intended to end in divorce...

- The unity of a man with a woman in marriage is sacred
- The pinnacle of the order of Creation
- Intended as the greatest symbol of unity
- Representing the unity and closeness God desires with His people

The Pharisees Defense:

Matthew 19:7 *“Why then did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?”*

- Referring to the Deuteronomy 24 passage again
- This passage was the entire basis for all of their teaching on divorce

Jesus' Answer...

Matthew 19:8 “*Moses permitted you to divorce...*”

- Upon closer study of the Deut. 24 passage it is clearly evident that Moses was writing as a concession, not a command!
- **Deut. 4:1** “*IF a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him...and he writes her a certificate of divorce...*”
- God’s Word **never** commanded or condoned divorce as the solution to marital problems
- Moses had permitted the Israelites to do it *because of their hardness of heart...* “*But it was not this way from the beginning.*” (Matt. 19:8)

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Jesus' Answer...

- The certificate of divorce was to protect them physically and socially
- It was proof that they had not left their husband by their own choice, but had been dismissed from his household, thus protecting them from unwarranted slander or abuse by the rest of the community

Jesus' conclusion...

Matthew 19:9

“I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

Divorce is *never* the ideal, and except in the case of “marital unfaithfulness”, it is considered adultery.

In a society like Israel, fraught with the disease of unrestrained divorce, we are at a similar place as the Pharisees, choosing how we will interpret Jesus' words.

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What is “marital unfaithfulness”?

Greek. *Porneia* (from which we get “pornography”)

- A broad term referring to any sexual activity outside of the relationship of marriage between a man and a woman
- Sexual unfaithfulness is the only Biblically mandated excuse for divorce

**But what about situations of verbal, emotional,
and physical abuse?**

**Why doesn't God seem to make provision for
divorce in such situations?**

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God Clearly Defends Women Throughout Scripture.

- The Old Testament condemns the mistreatment of women and children regularly
- Woman caught in adultery (John 8)
- Even Moses' concession of the certificate of divorce was meant to protect women who were unfairly dismissed by their husbands

God clearly works (and calls us to work) for the rescue of the abused and underprivileged, and in His grace, has obviously allowed for divorce in extreme cases of unfaithfulness and abandonment...but to the shame of those who did not first do *everything possible* to work for reconciliation.

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Matthew 5:33-37

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.

The Jewish leaders has taken similar license in interpreting God's command not to break their promises to the Lord... they had simply written religious standards for making promises that, if/when broken, would not break God's law and offend Him.

If breaking a promise before God was offensive, then their solution was not to base their promises on God.

So, they swore by lesser things, or so they thought:

- By Heaven
- By Earth
- By Jerusalem
- By their own head

God's laws against breaking promises were not about attaching them to Him or not.

In fact, Jesus says, no matter what you swear by (Heaven, Earth, Jerusalem, your own life) it all reflects back on God who created all of it.

God's concern is not His own feelings being hurt or reputation being tarnished...His concern is with the integrity and holiness of His people!

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Jesus Redefines Integrity:

- We are not just to keep our “really special” promises...
- We are to view everything that comes out of our mouths as a statement made before God, accountable to truth...
- God expects everything we say to be said (and followed through) with integrity and honesty...

So from your promise before God to love your spouse no matter what... to your simple affirmations and commitments in daily conversations...

- Are your words and actions representative of integrity and honesty?
- Are you trustworthy and reliable?

What's The Real Issue Here?

Why are these 2 passages placed side by side in Jesus' teaching on "the Kingdom life"?

- The real issue is an issue of loyalty and lordship
- The Pharisees were focused on bending God's Word to fit their personal needs and desires
- Their interpretation of Scripture was all about justifying their selfish actions and lack of integrity- in marriage, in word, and in everything else
- They were their own "lords," loyal only to themselves, using God's Word inaccurately to justify their life of sin

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Jesus has called us to surrender lordship to Him, to put our trust and our loyalty in Him...

- He has “raised the bar,” called us to live at a higher standard than what comes naturally to us...
- He has called us to “honor our vows”. From the ones we make before Him when we say “yes” to love someone no matter what...to the ones that we make in daily conversations about mundane things...
- He has called us to be holy, honest, and trustworthy before Him, before our families, and before all people...

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Let's take the next step in honoring the Lord, and make those things right today.

Apologize to God and your loved ones, and commit yourself anew to honoring your vows, both big and small.

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