

## **The Citizen's Pure Home**

### **Matthew 5:31-32**

#### **Introduction**

We have been looking at Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The theme; "true righteousness" in contrast to "false righteousness". The Lord describes the spiritual principles that are to govern His Kingdom. The Lord has spoken of the true meaning of righteousness in verses 1-16. In verses 17-48 Jesus explains the meaning of sin and an explanation of how to overcome these sins. Jesus has spoken of anger (vv.21-26); lust (vv.27-30) and now the laws surrounding divorce and remarriage (vv.31-32). Matthew's gospel will give a full treatment of this subject in chapter 19:1-15.

Marriage has always played a fundamental role in the stability and security of society and civilization. In Jesus' day there were two broad views concerning the sanctity of marriage and the preservation of marriage. The views were summed up by two Rabbi's Shammai; and Hillel. The conservative or strict view was held by Shammai who said the words "some uncleanness" (Deut.24:1) allowed for divorce, but the words meant adultery and adultery only. Hillel said "some uncleanness" meant that anything that destroyed the unity of marriage was a justified reason for divorce—since perfect unity was critical for the marriage state. This broad and liberal view was seen as a justification for the dissolution of the marriage for any reason or all reasons.

Marriage and divorce and remarriage had become so easy and common that it threatened the very fabric of Jewish society. All a man had to do at that time was request that the Rabbi give a bill of divorcement and hand it to his wife in the presence of two witnesses. The divorce was immediate and final (see Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

It's hard to overstate the tragic consequences of divorce. It effects everyone; husbands, wives, children, parents, friends, employers, employees, society. Divorce is devastating. It is spiritually, emotionally, physically and financially destructive. When the smoke clears and the dust settles, 4 out of 5 wives are worse off, and not better off. God hates divorce because He loves people. God hates divorce because He hates sin that always accompanies a failed marriage. God hates divorce because it violates His Word. Some of you are battling a thousand in this Sermon on the Mount. Have you ever been angry for no good reason? Have you ever looked and longed with lust at a person for the purpose of consuming them? Have you ever had a failed marriage? Anger and adultery are enough to disqualify a person from heaven. Why so much attention and focus on divorce and remarriage? Here our failures are most visible and most dramatic. Are you married and want out? Are you divorced and want to remarry? Will a failed marriage and subsequent remarriage bar you from the gates of heaven? Can a failed marriage keep me out of heaven? What is God's view of marriage, divorce and remarriage?

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#### **Divorce And Remarriage For Any Reason (v.31)**

*Matthew 5:31–32 (NKJV)* 31 “Furthermore it has been said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’

Once again Jesus will cite the law and then give the true meaning of the law.

A lady had gone through 4 marriages. First she married a millionaire. Then she married a film producer. Then she married a butler. and finally she married a funeral director. Somebody said, “Why did you marry these men?” Her reply; “Well I married 1 for the money. . .2 for the show. . .3 to get ready. . .you get it.

Why do so many people have such diverse opinions about marriage? There really are only four views and we will look briefly at all of them. The most liberal view allows divorce and remarriage for any reason. This is the view commonly adopted by our culture and society. We have had in place no-fault divorce laws for over a generation. Since 1970 more than a million children a year are victims of no-fault divorce laws. You don't need a reason a reason to get divorced anymore—so why offer reasons?

We live in a world that has turned the meaning of marriage on its head. What in the world is marriage? Dr. Ben Carson —famed Johns Hopkins Neurologist was put on the Southern Poverty Law Center's list of Extremists by simply saying that he believed marriage was a covenant between a man and a woman! Thankfully the Law Center has decided to remove the good Doctor from that list.

Let's briefly state the four views:

1. Divorce and remarriage for any reason.
2. Divorce and Remarriage for no reason.
3. Divorce for certain reasons and remarriage for no reason.
4. Divorce for certain reasons and remarriage for certain reasons.

All of these views cannot be correct. If you believe in the authority of the Bible, if you believe the answers that God has for marriage comes from the Bible, then one of these views is the correct view. But which one?

The dominant view in the time of Jesus was the first view; divorce and remarriage for any reason. We already talked about the two rabbinic schools, Hillel and Shammai. Hillel was the liberal (and popular) school. Both took their views on divorce from a passage in Scripture;

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Deuteronomy 24:1-4; “When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man’s wife, “if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife, “then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.”

Rabbi Hillel interpreted “uncleanness” to mean anything unclean or displeasing to the husband. The term is much broader than adultery, the punishment for adultery being death. You do not divorce a person who is dead. The Rabbi Hillel focused on what might cause uncleanness—disrupt unity and therefore put at risk the marriage. It did not take long for men to divorce their wives for almost any reason. If she failed to keep proper kosher, if she caused the man to lose his temper, if he found another woman more virtuous or attractive, if she embarrassed him in front of the other rabbi’s; if she couldn’t bear children. . .

Only the husband could sue for divorce. The wife could not divorce her husband. Like so many people today, the religious leaders read into the Bible passage what they wanted it to say rather than what it actually said. The focus of the passage is whether or not divorce is permitted or commanded but rather “. . .*how improper divorce leads to adultery, which results in defilement. Through Moses, God recognized and permitted divorce under certain circumstances when it was accompanied by a certificate, but He did not thereby condone or command divorce. God’s permission for divorce was but another accommodation of His grace to human sin (see Matt. 19:18). “Because of your hardness of heart,” Jesus explained to the Pharisees on another occasion, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way” (Matt.19:8)(MacArthur p. 310).*

The followers of Shammai opted for the narrow interpretation that ‘uncleanness’ meant some sort of sexual uncleanness. They insisted that a bill of divorcement be given. If sexual misconduct was involvement the followers of Shammai insisted on divorce. The followers of Hillel did not insist on a bill of divorce, but rather could follow the middle eastern custom of facing the wife three times; “I divorce you” in the presence of witnesses. “From Deuteronomy 24 forward a man must provide the woman he divorced with at least the dignity of a document indicating the divorce was his decision and not hers” (Bruner p. 188).

The literal rendering of the word “uncleanness” means “the nakedness of a a thing” (see John MacArthur p.310 who quotes Alfred Edersheim’s *Sketches of Jewish Social Life* pp.157-158). Some Bible scholars think this means indecent exposure, but others believe it could include anything improper, and carried with it the idea of a bad reputation. What kind of indecency carried with it the consequence of a letter of divorce? Some indecent act that fell short of actual adultery. Deuteronomy makes it clear that if a person divorced and then remarried under no

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circumstance could they return and remarry the first spouse. The only other place where the word unclean appears is in Deuteronomy 23:13-14; “and you shall have an implement among your equipment, and when you sit down outside, you shall dig with it and turn and cove your refuse. “For the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and give your enemies over to you; therefore your camp shall be holy, that He may see no **unclean thing** among you, and turn away from you.” “No unclean thing” means indecent and comes from the same root word.

God is not giving an excuse for divorce, but rather showing just how evil divorce really is. Giving a certificate simply allowed the woman to have some measure of social and cultural and legal protection! What God provided was an act of mercy and grace—and was interpreted by some as a commandment that you must divorce for sexual immorality, or you may divorce for any reason! Most people would not remain unmarried—but would rather remarry. 75% of divorced people eventually remarry. 60% bring children into the new marriage. What are the current statistics of blended families? What is the new normal? How many marriages in America are between a man and woman married for the first time?

### Divorce And Remarriage For No Reason

Some have argued that the Bible teaches no divorce and no remarriage at any time for any reason. The Bible certainly has a high view of marriage. The Bible certainly has a low view of divorce. **But the Bible does not teach this position.**

Some teachers have argued or maintain that the word *apohuo* (*divorce*) has the basic meaning of let loose, go free and refers to separation, broken engagement or desertion. “A common view of this passage is that Jesus is referring only to divorce during the betrothal period, such as that mentioned in Matthew 1:18-19. But when used in the context of a man and a wife, the common meaning of *apohuo* was always divorce—not merely separation or the breaking of an engagement” (Cf. Matt.19:3, 7-9; Mark 10:2,4, 11-12; Luke 16:18)(MacArthur p.315).

There are several reasons why this view is incorrect. It cannot refer to a broken betrothal because the context for the passage is Deuteronomy 24, which does not deal with broken engagements but with broken marriages. Also, the bond of matrimony began in a Hebrew marriage at the betrothal, not consummation. The perfect illustration is Mary and Joseph. In the Old Testament, the punishment was death for adultery, whether the adultery was committed during the betrothal period or after the consummation. Prior to betrothal, a man and a woman who committed sexual acts were required to marry each other (see Deut. 22:28-29). People listening to Jesus understood Jesus to mean marriage and divorce, not betrothal, separation or desertion.

Some people have taught that the exception clause here (v.32) for sexual immorality allows for divorce for Jews only, and then only in the case where a person marries a near relative, a practice

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forbidden in Leviticus 18. These people point out the exception is only found in Matthew and to interpret divorce for Christians for any reason is to contradict the law governing sin and adultery. God only needs to say something once for it to be true. The exception clause would have been inappropriate in the passages on Mark 10, Luke 16, because Jesus was correcting the religious leaders **false views of God's Law regarding adultery.**

### **Divorce For Certain Reasons and Remarriage For No Reason**

Jesus makes it clear that by divorcing a woman on grounds other than sexual immorality, makes his innocent former wife commit adultery—if she remarries—and it is assumed that remarriage will take place. Elsewhere Jesus makes this clear (Mark 10:11-12); “So He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.” The sinful divorce is what makes the remarriage an adulterous situation, not remarriage itself.

It is true that a person who seeks and obtains a divorce for other than Biblical reasons is not free to remarry. The simple rule is “if you do not have the right to divorce, you do not have the right to remarry.” The person who embarks on such a course of action, who disregards the Scripture, creates a chain of adultery for all the people involved. Few things in the world bring the measure of destruction that divorce brings. But to further aggravate and complicate the situation by remarrying when you have no biblical right only increases the bitterness, confusion, resentment, despair conflict and hardship. It also eliminates the possibility for reconciliation.

It is important that we understand what the passage does not say (v.31). Jesus does not say those who remarry following a divorce will live in adultery. The original Greek passage is very clear on this subject. Jon Courson writes; “I strongly believe it means this: If divorce and remarriage occur, you have missed the best. God's best is that there is one man for one woman until death separates them. God's best is that marriage be redeemed and restored. If that doesn't happen, you miss the best, miss the mark, sin” (p.106).

### **Divorce For Certain Reasons and Remarriage For Certain Reasons (v.32)**

*32But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.*

Jesus comes not to destroy but fulfill the law, and he upholds Moses' teaching in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Because the religious leaders had dumbed down the standard, because they taught divorce for any reason and all reasons, they caused a blight of adultery to take place among the people of God. The religious teachers of Jesus' day thought they were teaching God's Word, but they had only managed to perpetuate and proliferate sin and invite God's judgment. Since you could divorce for any reason all you needed to worry about was the paperwork!

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You will recall the religious leaders were proud they never committed adultery (vv.27-30). Jesus said no sacrifice was too great to prevent immorality (vv.29-30). Now Jesus is basically bringing an indictment against them for divorcing for any reason. **There is only one reason Jesus permits, and that is sexual immorality.** The fact that Jesus allows it, means we cannot disallow it. Sexual immorality is not grounds for divorce or a command to divorce. You have the right to forgive. You have the right to remain in the marriage. It is simply the only ground that Jesus recognizes to call it quits.

Jesus did not come to destroy the law but it would appear that God allowed divorce in the past under certain circumstances. No OT passage allows for divorce, but God Himself uses the metaphor of Divorce to describe His own dissolution of marriage to both Israel and Judah. **That's right—God got a divorce! Does that shock you?** In Jeremiah 3:8. Rather than put all Israel and Judah to death, he mercifully allowed a divorce. Joseph was also ready to put Mary away rather than stone her for the presumed adultery. Why did God allow divorce to replace the death penalty? It could be that the people of God had so immersed themselves in sin that no one was available to carry out the death sentence, or it was carried out in an inconsistent manner. God in His mercy, chose Himself not to enforce the death penalty.

The word for 'sexual immorality' is *pornea*

This refers to any kind of sexual relation—whether heterosexual or homosexual it was a broad term that could incorporate incest, molestation, bestiality—all punishable by death in the OT. Again Jesus does not insist on divorce. The innocent party who made every effort to preserve the marriage, is free to remarry. If the offending party continues in adultery, seeks and obtains a divorce, the other party is free to remarry. Paul adds one more legitimate ground for divorce and subsequent remarriage. 1 Cor. 7:12-15; "But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace."

## Conclusion

Have you experienced anger? Lust? A failed marriage? In cases where divorce has occurred, even sinful divorces, where you bear a measure of sin guilt and blame, is there redemption? Is there hope? Is there forgiveness? If Jesus is who I think He is, and if he says what he means, you can be sure the answer is yes! Anger and lust and divorce are not the unforgivable sins! The Bible does not say 'all manner of sin is forgivable except divorce.' Murder is bad—but some murderers are given more grace and compassion than those who have experienced a failed

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marriage. Divorced people should not be viewed as failures and rejects—forever barred from grace, mercy, forgiveness, hope, restoration. We are all sinners who have missed the mark. Would it surprise you to know that murderers and adulterers might be sitting right next to you or behind you or in front of you? The Lord Jesus is willing to forgive murderers, adulterers, and divorced people! Does this mean you are now free—to kill that person who annoys you—commit adultery with that person who inflames you—or divorce that person in that marriage that you may have come to despise? Would you march forward in greater sin? Will you gamble with God's grace? If you do you are missing the point of this message. If you are unwise, selfish and bent on destroying yourself, your children and your future you may decide to get a divorce. But if you are wise—and self-less and committed to honoring and loving and serving the Lord Jesus—you will find a way—to honor God even in the most difficult of circumstances. Learn what it means to bring Christ into your marriage. Learn what it means to live in God's grace in the power of the Holy Spirit. Some of the statistics are staggering. One in three marriages in our culture end in divorce. But the statistics are surprising low—in the Church of Jesus. Did you know if a couple are married in the Church—attend Church on a regular basis the rate plummets to 1-50—pray and read the Bible together—the divorce rate goes down to 1 in 1,105!

That's the difference that Jesus makes in a marriage!