

“CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE”

Matthew 5:31-37

Author and business leader Fred Smith writes...

One of my treasured memories comes from a doughnut shop in Grand Saline, Texas. There was a young farm couple sitting at the table next to mine. He was wearing overalls, and she was wearing a gingham dress. After finishing their doughnuts, he got up to pay the bill, and I noticed she didn't get up to follow him. But then he came back and stood in front of her.

She put her arms around his neck, and he lifted her up, revealing that she was wearing a full-body brace. He lifted her out of her chair and backed out the front door to the pickup truck, with her hanging from his neck. As he gently put her into the truck, everyone in the shop watched. No one said anything until a waitress remarked, almost reverently, *"He took his vows seriously."* Leadership, Vol. 16, no. 1.

Marriage, as we have known it for years, is under an all-out assault! Purity, before and after marriage, is ridiculed in movies, music, and T.V. sitcoms. At the same time, perversions are glamorized. I have a question for you. Why do so many men and women who lovingly say, “I do,” to some of the strongest vows turn around in months or years and proclaim, “I can’t”?

What did Jesus teach about marriage and divorce? Take your Bible and turn to Matthew 5 and let’s continue our study of the Sermon on the Mount. Only four basic interpretations of the biblical data on divorce and remarriage are possible, and all four are found in various Christian circles.

- **The strictest view is that divorce is not permissible under any circumstance or for any reason.**
- **The opposite position contends that both divorce and remarriage are permissible for any reason or none.**
- **Another position is that divorce is permitted under certain circumstances but remarriage is never permitted.**
- **The final view is that both divorce and remarriage are permitted under certain circumstances.¹**

Let's begin our study tonight by reading Matthew 5:31-37...

Matthew 5:31–32... “It was said, ‘WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE’; 32 but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for *the* reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

These words should be taken together with a closely related passage in Matthew 19...

Matthew 19:3–9... Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, “Is it lawful *for a man* to divorce his wife for any reason at all?” 4 And He answered and said, “Have you not read that He who created *them* from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, 5 and said, ‘FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH’? 6 “So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” 7 They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND *her* AWAY?” 8 He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. 9 “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., [Matthew](#), vol. 1, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985–1989), 308.

The Pharisees had come to Christ testing him with an interpretation of the major Old Testament passage regarding the grounds for divorce.² God's standard is clearly *purity before marriage* and *fidelity after marriage*. This is rooted in the Old Testament (**Genesis 1:27-28; Genesis 2:18-25; Malachi 2:14-16**). We are too quick to run to the exceptions without focusing our attention on God's ultimate standard for the marriage relationship.

MacArthur explained...

As God designed it, marriage is to be the welding of two people together into one unit, the blending of two minds, two wills, two sets of emotions, two spirits. It is a bond the Lord intends to be indissoluble as long as both partners are alive. The Lord created sex and procreation to be the fullest expression of that oneness, and the intimacies of marriage are not to be shared with any other human being.³

"WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE"... In the first century two slightly older contemporaries of Jesus, the Pharisees Shammai and Hillel, vigorously debated the legitimate grounds for divorce.⁴

School of Shammai: Restricted the 'some indecency' of Deuteronomy 24:1 to refer only to sexual immorality.

School of Hillel: Reputedly took it to mean any cause, even burning the dinner. Most people followed the teaching of Hillel. Therefore, a little paperwork was all that was needed to *legalize their lust* (5:27-30).

² James Montgomery Boice, [The Sermon on the Mount: An Expository Commentary](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 116–117.

³ John F. MacArthur Jr., [Matthew](#), vol. 1, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985–1989), 311.

⁴ Craig Blomberg, [Matthew](#), vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 110.

The Lord's primary purpose in referring to Deuteronomy 24:1–4 was not to provide for divorce but to prevent it.⁵

“But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity” ... This word, *unchastity*, is a broader term for sexual sin of all kinds.

“Makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery” ... Jesus said that every time a man *without proper cause* turned his wife loose to remarry, he forced her into adultery, which made him guilty also. In addition, the man who married the former wife and the woman who married the former husband were likewise guilty of adultery. The result was multiplied adultery! Jesus' whole point is that divorce leads to adultery.⁶ A man or woman who has no right to divorce has no right to remarry.

Because Jesus specifically mentions divorce being permissible on the grounds of adultery (Matt. 5:32; 19:9), and because He also specifically says that He did not come to contradict or annul the least part of the law (5:18–19), it seems evident that *at some point during Israel's history divorce was allowed to take the place of execution as a legitimate penalty for adultery* (Leviticus 20:10).⁷ Joseph, a righteous man, was prepared to divorce Mary rather than stone her for her presumed adultery (Matt. 1:19).

⁵ John F. MacArthur Jr., [Matthew](#), vol. 1, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985–1989), 311.

⁶ John F. MacArthur Jr., [Matthew](#), vol. 1, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985–1989), 315.

⁷ John F. MacArthur Jr., [Matthew](#), vol. 1, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985–1989), 317.

Ultimately, God in His mercy chose Himself not to enforce the death penalty. That is consistent with the divine nature revealed in Jesus, who challenged the Pharisees who were about to stone a woman for adultery and then forgave her Himself (John 8:7). Apart from the death penalty, divorce became the divine alternative, tolerated only because of the hardness of the human heart, as Jesus states in Matthew 19:8.⁸

As we move into verses 33-37, I want you to think about the problem of deception in the context of our families. Here's a powerful testimony by Coach Bill McCartney that speaks to this issue...

When I took the job as head football coach at the University of Colorado in 1982, I made a solemn promise: I told everybody that with me, God was first, family second, and football third.

But I didn't keep that promise for long. The thrill and the challenge of resurrecting a football program in disarray simply took too much time and attention. As my teams kept winning year after year, I kept losing focus of my priorities.

When we won the national championship in 1990, many people said I had reached the pinnacle of my profession. But for me, there was an emptiness about it. I had everything a man could want, and yet something was missing. I was so busy pursuing my career goals that I was missing out on the Spirit-filled life that God wanted me to have.

All because I had broken my promise to put God first and foremost in my life. Bill McCartney, founder of Promise Keepers. Men of Integrity, Vol. 1, no. 1.

⁸ John F. MacArthur Jr., [Matthew](#), vol. 1, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985–1989), 317.

Are you a promise keeper or a promise breaker? Jesus brought this problem up in the Sermon on the Mount and tied telling the truth into the pattern of righteousness a person must have in order to enter the kingdom of God. Why did Jesus bring this up? The religious leaders of Jesus' day were supporting the abuse of truth instead of supporting God's radical demand for truth. So, let's dive into the Scripture and immerse ourselves into this super-charged debate for truth.

Matthew 5:33–37... “Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.’ **34** “But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, **35** or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. **36** “Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. **37** “But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; anything beyond these is of evil.”

Keep your vows. That's the message in these verses. This principle that Jesus taught was derived from three passages in the Old Testament...

Leviticus 19:12... ‘You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the LORD.

Numbers 30:2... “If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.”

Deuteronomy 23:21... “When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the LORD your God will surely require it of you.”

Jesus took these three passages and put forth a composite truth. The first was stated like this—“***You shall not make false vows.***” Literally, this means that one should not perjure themselves. Then, his second statement was

“But shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.” This means to enclose, as with fence, or to bind together.

The religious leaders devised a clever scheme for undermining the truth God demanded in every situation of life, including the marriage relationship. Instead of making vows based on the name of God, they made vows based on heaven, or earth, and even their own heads.

One fatal error formed the heart of this twisted philosophy. That error was the belief that a person could neatly divide his life into the sacred and the secular. For them, it meant that they could be truthful in their spiritual lives and lie like crazy in their business endeavors or in their families as long as they didn't bring God's name into the vow. Heaven is God's. The earth is God's. Jerusalem is God's. Every person's head is God's.

Listen, you can't live like this if you are a part of the kingdom the Father is building for His Son. Jesus is Lord of everything! Every promise you make is made in the presence of the living and holy God. Whenever truth is compromised, God's name is compromised!

Oaths are to be used only on important occasions and they are to be given in the name of the Lord. William Hendriksen commented:

What we have here in Matthew 5:33-37 is the condemnation of the flippant, profane, uncalled for, and often hypocritical oath, used in order to make an impression or to spice daily conversation (found in MacArthur's Commentary, p. 324)

Jesus expects His followers to consistently tell the truth. This is God's standard and anything less is unacceptable. Listen to these passages that highlight God's demand for truth...

Psalm 51:6... Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.

Ephesians 4:25... Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE *of you* WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another.

Colossians 3:9... Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices.

Every word that comes out of our mouths should be a truthful word. This is the standard God has established for anyone who would be a part of His Son's kingdom.

Until 1997, Michael Jordan, indisputably the best player in the NBA for over a decade, was never the highest paid player. When asked why he did not do what so many other players do—hold out on their contracts until they get more money—Michael replied...

I have always honored my word. I went for security. I had six-year contracts, and I always honored them. People said I was underpaid, but when I signed on the dotted line, I gave my word.... He explained that if his kids saw their dad breaking a promise, how could he continue training them to keep their word. By not asking for a contract renegotiation, Michael Jordan spoke volumes to his children. He told them, "You stand by your word, even when that might go against you."

The great Roman orator Cicero said, "***Truth is the highest thing a man can experience.***" Daniel Webster wrote, "***There is nothing as powerful as truth and often nothing as strange.***" This passage of Scripture roars with words that cannot be mistaken—"Tell the truth; keep your vows!" Jesus is the embodiment of truth. He said, "***I am the way, the truth, and the life.***"

I want to close out our time tonight by sharing a few principles about the sacred nature of marriage...

- **Marriage is between a man and a woman.**
- **God designed marriage to be permanent.**
- **Prioritize your relationship with the Lord & your spouse.**
- **Guard your heart and fight for your marriage.**
- **Keep the promise you made to your spouse.**