

Life as It Was Meant to Be

Harpeth Hills Summer Series

Studies in the Sermon on the Mount

Interpretive guides for Jesus' sermon

- “You have **heard** . . .”
 - This is not “Old Test vs. New Test,” “Law vs. Grace,” or “Letter vs. Spirit”
 - It is Received (Rabbinic) Readings vs. Intended (Authorial) Meaning
- The sermon is filled with **hyperbole**
 - Definition: obvious exaggeration for the sake of emphasis
 - E.g., hatred is murder, lust is adultery, gouge out your eye, cut off your hand
- Jesus wants us to understand God's commandments at a deep level
 - He is only making explicit what The Ten Commandments already said!
 - #10: “You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor” (Ex 20:17)

Purity of Heart

Matthew 5 ²⁷ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ ²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.”

Purity of Heart: The Meaning

- Lust is NOT adultery in the strict sense: this is *hyperbole*
 - Just as anger/hatred is NOT murder in the strict sense
 - But what is the *root cause* of all evil?
- This interpretation of the Seventh Commandment . . .
 - Builds on Jesus' teaching about "defilement" / Matt 15:17-20
 - Prepares for what follows about "fruit" / Matt 7:17; *cf. Gal 5:19-23*
- So we guard against suggestive actions, words, pictures, entertainment, and/or persons that invite impure sexual thoughts/obsessions

Sanctity of Marriage

Matthew 5 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.”

about **DIVORCE**

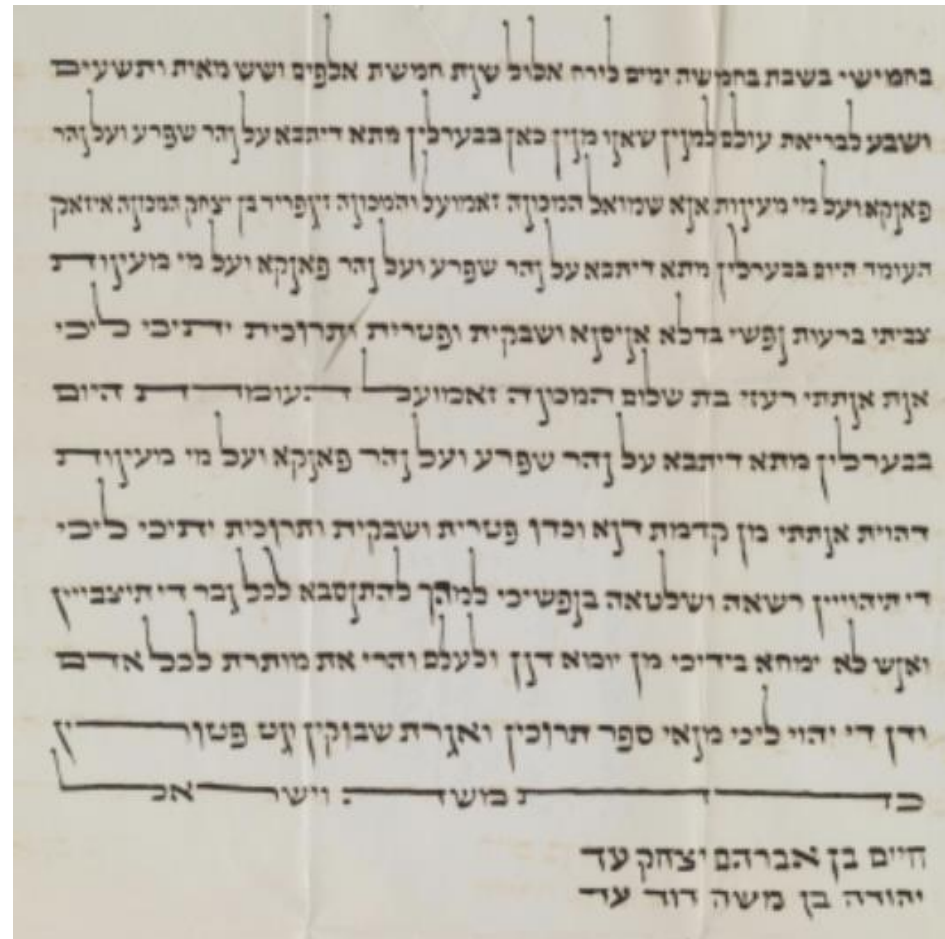
- **Marriage** *is the covenantal bond between one male and one female who come together as one flesh to take part in the divine purpose of creating new life by bearing and rearing children and to support and enrich each other as they live within the will of God / Gen 1-2*
- **Divorce** is the formal dissolution of a marital covenant / Gen 3:1ff
 - It has never been part of the ideal will of God
 - Divorce is documented at least 2,000 years before Christ – Lipit-Ishtar Code, Code of Hammurabi, ancient Assyrian law codes
 - Exodus 21, Deuteronomy 24, and a few statements in the Prophets document divorce among the Jewish people

about **DIVORCE** in the Old Testament

- The Torah did not create divorce, but it acknowledges it and seeks to regulate and (generally) to discourage it / cf. Ezra 10:3-5; Mal 2:10-16
- When there is a divorce, there should be good cause / Deut 24:1ff
 - What a debate this generated! What is the “indecent” (Heb, *’erwat dabar*)?
 - Often overlooked: The motive of Deut 24 is *protection of the woman!*
- But there is more to the Old Testament literature on divorce
 - A wife is explicitly protected in Exodus 21:10 from a hard-hearted husband who denies her “food, clothing and marital rights” – *an abusive man*
 - If he is guilty of this sort of abuse, she can go free / Ex 21:11
 - *Paul may be mirroring this teaching at 1 Cor 7:15*
 - The certificate of divorce for “hardness of heart” is in view here / Cf. Matt 19

about **DIVORCE** in the Old Testament

- The “certificate of divorce” (Heb, *get*)



What the certificate says

- “She is free to marry any man in Israel”
- Neither Roman nor Jewish law knows of divorce that does not also carry the right (and assumption) of remarriage
 - Language of some NT texts (i.e., “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another”) can also be translated “Whoever divorces his wife in order to marry another”
 - The notion of celibacy as a “penalty” for divorce is not from Scripture
 - Is divorce really the most abominable of sins that carries an ongoing penalty that, for example, murder or child molestation does not?

What Jesus said about divorce

- To initiate divorce “except for [her] fornication” sins against her: “makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”
 - Note: only a male could initiate and secure a certificate of divorce
 - Only if his wife’s “indecent” was fornication (Gk, *porneia* = any form of illicit sex), he could divorce her and not be sinning against her.
- What is typically missed in interpreting this verse
 - NIV tries to capture PASSIVE verb: “causes her to be adulterated”
 - “Adultery” is what the man does in the covenant-breaking act of divorcing a woman for some trivial cause – *not something she does if she remarries*
 - This continues the hyperbole found throughout Matthew 5
 - Remarriage is presumed whenever a divorce occurs, for whatever reason

Important points of interpretation

- “Adultery” is not remarriage, but one’s trivial dissolution of a marriage
- Cf. “**Mark 10** ¹¹ “[Jesus] answered, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her.¹² And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.’”
- “But aren’t marriages ‘indissoluble’ so that people are still ‘married in the eyes of the Lord’ following a civil divorce?”
 - Marriages can be dissolved / terminated, otherwise why warn against it? Mk 10:9
 - Woman at the well had “five husbands” – not one husband and a series of lovers to whom she was never married “in the eyes of God” / John 4:18
- In biblical texts, people “commit” adultery (i.e., covenant-breaking) by trivial divorce but do not “live in” adultery

What to do about adultery?

- As with lust, hatred, murder, or any other sin – repent and do whatever is possible to set matters right
 - Does this mean “go back to one’s original mate”? 1 Cor 7:11
 - If already remarried, does this mean getting a second divorce to fix the first one? 1 Cor 7:27-28
- Is the fear that saying divorced people can remarry might prompt someone to get a trivial divorce, say a prayer, and marry again?
 - That would be a corrupt heart and seems to be a “willful” sin / Heb 10:26
 - Does the fact that all other sins can be forgiven carry the possibility that someone might try to “exploit” forgiveness?
 - *I am more concerned about the “decent soul” whose marriage fails and whose future is taken away by a misinterpretation of Jesus’ words*

A Summary of the Jesus Materials

1. Jesus did not set aside what was in Torah about divorce and remarriage
2. Jesus acknowledged that divorce happens because of human weakness
3. Jesus pointed out that the common rabbinic interpretation was hurting the women Torah was written to protect
4. Jesus said that trivial divorce is “adultery against” one’s mate and “makes her a victim of adultery”
5. Adultery is not an unpardonable sin
6. Celibacy is not a condition of forgiveness
7. There is no precedent for breaking up subsequent marriages in the name of repentance

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