



A Systematic Expository Study of the Word of God

Special Study: **CHRIST'S TEACHING ON THE PERMANENCE OF MARRIAGE** **Matthew 5:31,32**

"It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement". Moral values had disappeared in Israel and the sanctity of marriage had been trampled under feet. ***"The priests said not, Where is the LORD? and they that handle the law knew me not"*** (Jeremiah 2:8). At a time, separation or putting away the wife became so common that it threatened the identity and dignity of the nation. Some men counted it ***"lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause"*** (Matthew 19:3). Because of ***"the hardness of their hearts"***, Moses permitted them to put away their wives, but only after a long process of securing ***"a writing of divorcement."*** The requirement of a writing was to a certain degree a check upon an evil habit of hastily sending away their wives under a sudden passion of anger. What was only tolerated and permitted because of the hardness of their hearts, the Pharisees had turned to a command! Our Lord has come to remove the hardness of heart; and He has also brought marriage back to what it was ***"at the beginning"***. ***"Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder"*** (Matthew 19:3-6).

ERRONEOUS CONCEPT AND THE PERVERSION OF MARRIAGE

Matthew 5:31; Jeremiah 3:1,7,8,12-14; 2:1-5,9; Ephesians 5:1; Malachi 2:14-16; Proverbs 6:16-19; Jeremiah 44:4-6; Revelation 2:6; Psalm 97:10.

"It hath been said, ... but I say unto you". Christ made it clear and plain that He had not come to approve the permissive and perverted ways of men. Only the Antichrist, not Christ, will ***"think to change times and laws"*** (Daniel 7:25). Since the time of Moses, the children of Israel had ***"hardness of heart"*** and so refused the perfect word and will of God (Matthew 19:8; Ezekiel 3:7; Zechariah 7:12; Mark 3:5). Before Christ came, the perfect will of God was temporarily set aside and they were permitted to give ***"a writing of divorcement"*** under certain conditions. The Pharisees wanted the situation to become worse. They wanted license to be added to liberty; they desired authorisation for the permissive perversion of marriage. They asked, ***"Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?"*** Whatever men do and whatever nations legislate, God says, ***"I am the LORD, I change not"*** (Malachi 3:6). ***"He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so"*** (Matthew 19:8). Even in the Old Testament, ***"The LORD, the God of Israel, saith that He hateth putting away"*** (Malachi 2:16).

EXPLICIT COMMAND ON THE PERMANENCE OF MARRIAGE

Matthew 5:32; 19:3-9; 1 Corinthians 7:2; Deuteronomy 22:13-21; 1 Corinthians 6:9,10; Galatians 5:19-21; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:17,18; Romans 7:2,3; Matthew 18:21,22; Ephesians 4:30-32; John 8:3-11.

The difference between the Pharisees' interpretation and Christ's interpretation is the difference between night and day or the difference between darkness and light. Matthew 19:3-9 is very important and helpful in understanding Matthew 5:32 because it is a fuller explanation of what our Lord puts here in a summarised form. He emphasised the sanctity of marriage. In His teaching, He referred to God's original plan, ***"at the beginning"*** before the law of Moses. When God created the woman to be a helpmeet for the man, He made that great pronouncement: ***"They shall be one flesh"*** (Genesis 2:24). ***"They twain shall be one flesh"*** (Matthew 19:5). ***"They two shall be one flesh"*** (Ephesians 5:31). Christ's conclusion and command is logical and binding: ***"Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder"*** (Matthew 19:6). In God's original plan, the marriage union is indissoluble. The perfect plan of God is that a man should leave father and mother and be joined to his wife and that they should become one flesh. Certain other ties are broken but this all-important ***"one flesh"*** tie is final and permanent.

EXPLANATORY CAUTION AND THE PRESERVATION OF MARRIAGE

Matthew 5:32; 19:9; 1:18-21; John 8:41-44; Genesis 2:18-24; 3:11,12,17-21; Romans 7:2,3; 1 Corinthians 7:10,11,39; Ephesians 5:25,28-31; Colossians 3:13,14.

“Saving for the cause of fornication” or **“except it be for fornication”** (Matthew 5:32; 19:9) will need proper understanding. Generally, when the word fornication is used alone in a verse of Scripture, it refers to immorality of every kind. But when the words fornication and adultery appear together in the same verse, then each word takes on a specific meaning. (See Mark 7:21; 1 Corinthians 6:9; Galatians 5:19). Compare the words man, woman. When the word, man, is used alone in a verse of Scripture, it can stand for both men and women (1 Corinthians 10:13; Luke 9:62) but when both man and woman appear together in the same verse, the word man will be restricted to males (1 Corinthians 11:3,7; 1 Timothy 5:16). In Matthew 5:32; 19:9, fornication refers to the sin of immorality before marriage.

In the Old Testament, fornication before marriage or adultery within marriage was punishable by death (Deuteronomy 22:13-22). In the New Testament, fornication and adultery are terrible sins but not unpardonable sins. If the fornicator or the adulterer realises the enormity of his or her sins, God will forgive and restore him/her fully to divine fellowship. Then God’s Word commands us to **“forgive one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you”** (Ephesians 4:32).

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