

## 4. Divorce

In the previous lesson the Lord dealt with sexual immorality in a way that settles most modern departures from the word of the Lord. In Matt 5:28, the Lord said, "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Single sexual relationships, extra marital or adulterous relationships, homosexuality, and pornography are the results of "the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does." 1 John 2:16. The previous lesson also taught that the New Testament explicitly condemns sexual immorality. See Matt. 15:19, 1 Cor 6:13-18, and Gal 5:19. Divorce may lead to sexual immorality, but it is not immoral in and of itself. The New Testament gives us laws that govern divorce. These laws satisfy most problems created by divorce. Individual Christians must apply these laws to their circumstances. The Lord made it individual and personal when the apostles asked in about difficult situations occurring from divorces where people are unable to remarry in Matt 19:10-12:

10 The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry."

11 Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given.  
12 For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."

Paul also expressed this individual responsibility when talking about Christians deserted by unbelieving partners in marriage in 1 Cor 7: 24: "Brothers, each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to."

### The Moral Law of Marriage: The Effect of Divorce on the Spouse

Matt 5:31-32: 31 "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.'<sup>1</sup> 32 But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.

If one puts away his wife, it must be for marital unfaithfulness. This law runs counter to the practices of modern society where people may put away their spouse for reasons like incompatibility. In fact:

Using a quasi-experimental pre-post intervention design and archival data from the National Center for Health Statistics, a team of researchers at the University of Oklahoma examined the effect adoption of no-fault divorce law had on the divorce rate across the 50 states. Education and income data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census and religiosity data from the Glenmary Research Center were used to assess the role of education, median family income and religiosity under the no-fault divorce regime. The researchers found that no-fault divorce laws had a significant positive effect on the divorce rate across the 50 states.

#### Variation in divorce rates among Christian faith groups:

| Denomination (in order of decreasing divorce rate)           | % who have been divorced |
|--|--------------------------|
| Non-denominational (small conservative groups; independents) | 34%                      |
| Baptists   | 29%                      |
| Mainline Protestants   | 25%                      |
| Mormons  | 24%                      |
| Catholics  | 21%                      |
| Lutherans  | 21%                      |

People in America who describe themselves as born-again Christians have the highest divorce rate. In a given year, there are 2,230,000 marriages and approximately 1,300,000 divorces.

If divorces were only for marital unfaithfulness, the problems would diminish. **The law of Christ is clear: one can put away a spouse only for marital unfaithfulness.**

## **The Moral Law of Divorce and Remarriage**

Matt 19:3-13: *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. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."*

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 marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."*

10 *The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry."*

11 *Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. 12 For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."*

Jesus had explained in the Sermon on the Mount that anyone puts away his wife except for marital unfaithfulness causes his wife to commit adultery and causes the one who marries the wife to commit adultery. Jesus gives the second law in certain terms: **"Anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."**

## **The Law of Marriage and the Death of a Spouse**

Rom 7:1-3: *1 Do you not know, brothers – for I am speaking to men who know the law – that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives? 2 For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. 3 So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man.*

The second way to be released from the law of marriage is by the death of a spouse. The first, as we have seen, was marital unfaithfulness. *Released or loosed*, as in other versions, comes from the word *eleutheros* (el-yoo'-ther-os) and means unrestrained (to go at pleasure), i.e. (as a citizen) not a slave (whether freeborn or manumitted), or (genitive case) exempt (from obligation or liability); KJV - free (man, woman), at liberty. (Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright © 1994, 2003 Biblesoft, Inc. and International Bible Translators, Inc.).

The law of marriage and death binds husbands and wives only so long as they live. Should one die, the other is free to marry. The law is clear: **"If her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man."**

## **The Law of Marriage When an Unbeliever Leaves a Believer**

1 Cor 7:10-24: *10 To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. 11 But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.*

12 *To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. 13 And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.*

15 *But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances;*

God has called us to live in peace. 16 How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

17 Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches. 18 Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. 19 Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts. 20 Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him. 21 Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you – although if you can gain your freedom, do so. 22 For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave. 23 You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. 24 Brothers, each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to.

The law of marriage when an unbeliever leaves a believer is clearly stated: **“But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances.”** The debate centers on the phrase, *is not bound*. Does this mean a Christian is free to remarry? The word, itself, leaves little room for quarrel. The word is the Greek word *dedoúlootai*, coming from *douloo* (doo-lo'-o); from NT: to enslave (literally or figuratively), Bring into (be under) bondage, given, become (make) servant. (Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright © 1994, 2003 Biblesoft, Inc. and International Bible Translators, Inc.).

One gets the meaning of the word fully when viewed in Rom 6:6 in reference to our release from sin: “Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.” To what degree Christians are not bound to sin, to that degree is a Christian, whose spouse has deserted, not bound to that spouse.

The point of the last paragraph is that Christians have to live in the state that they are called. Paul said, “This is the rule I lay down in all the churches.”

## **The Law Of Marriage and Divorce Governing Elders, Deacons, and Widows Indeed**

1 Tim 3:1-2: *This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. 2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach . . .*

1 Tim 3:12: *12 Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.*

1 Tim 5:9: *9 Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man.*

On three occasions, Paul specifies that those of the highest office be the husband or wife of one spouse. What does this necessarily infer about the general state of marriage in the early church?

## **Conclusion**

In a world that is not ideal, many come to the gospel with problems created by the former lives they have lived by force or by choice. Husbands have wives, masters have slaves, many have far-reaching family responsibilities, and addicts bring their addictions—these and more complicate the lives of Christians. Jesus said of this complicated problem: “Not everyone can accept this word . . . The one who can accept this should accept it.” Paul also laid down the rule that governs the church in these matters: “Brothers, each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to.”

The rule for all Christians is in 1 Cor 6:18, “Flee from sexual immorality.”