

# ST. SIMEON ANGLICAN CHURCH, OFF FUTA ROAD, AKURE

## BIBLE STUDY, 10/09/2008

### STUDY 17

## THE INDISSOLUBLE MARITAL UNION

Matthew 5:31 – 32

The normal custom of the ancient Near East was for a man to verbally divorce his wife. The Arab custom was to say "I divorce you" three times and the divorce was consummated without any legal protection of any kind to the wife. In contrast the ancient law of Israel insisted on a *writing of divorcement* or *certificate of divorce*. This written statement gave legal protection to both the wife and the husband. Men's divorcing of their wives upon dislike, displeasure or for any other cause however tolerated and practised among the Jews, was a violation of the seventh commandment, as it opened a door to adultery.

*But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication.* As fornication signifies no more than the unlawful connection of unmarried persons, it cannot be used here when speaking of those who are married (Matthew 15:19; Mark 7:21). It does not appear that there is any other case in which Jesus Christ admits of divorce. A real Christian ought rather to beg of God the grace to bear patiently and quietly the imperfections of his wife, than to think of the means of being parted from her. "But divorce was allowed by Moses;" yes, for the hardness of their hearts it was permitted: but what was permitted to an uncircumcised heart among the Jews, should not serve for a rule to a heart in which the love of God has been shed abroad by the Holy Spirit. Those who form a matrimonial connection in the fear and love of God, and under his direction, will never need a divorce. Those who marry as passion or money lead the way, may be justly considered adulterers and adulteresses as long as they live. But if we love Christ as our Lord, we will respect His authority, and we will abide by His teaching! Not our Will, but His Will be done!

### 1. Marriage: the creative acts of God

Matthew 5:31–32; Genesis 1:23–28; 2:18–24; Ecclesiastes 4:9–12; Ezra 9–10; Nehemiah 13:23–27; I Corinthians 7:2–9; 39; II Corinthians 6:14; Ephesians 5:21–33

In the account of the creation of heaven and earth in Genesis 1, there is a series of statements describing the creative acts of God, separating light from darkness, separating land from sea, etc. And in all of these activities God evaluates what he has done and says, "It is good," or "It is very good." Then we come to a statement in Genesis 2: "*It is not good that the man should be alone*". For the first time, the witness of Scripture is that something is not good, and God intervenes to overcome human loneliness by creating marriage.

Marriage was instituted by God when He declared, "*It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him*". So God fashioned woman and brought her to man. On seeing the woman, Adam exclaimed, "*This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man*". This passage also emphasizes the truth that "*a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh*". This suggests that God's ideal is for a man to be the husband of one wife and for the marriage to be

a permanent union between man and woman that they might be helpful to one another and for the mutual benefit.

There are two involved in this creative acts of God, and then the two are joined together (as oxen in the plow, where each must pull equally, in order to bring it on), not ultimately by their own decision-making and their own creative relationship-building, but by God himself. When God creates a life that did not exist before, when He takes two and makes them one, the new oneness has His stamp on it and His heart in it. And it is a terrible offence to kill what matters to Him. Adultery is the taking of a life in a sense very similar to that in which murder of a human being is the taking of a life.

Marriage is a great mystery. It is an extraordinary thing, and we will never plumb its depth. It involves the joining of our spirit to someone else's. It involves the intertwining of our emotional life with theirs. It involves physical intimacy, taking on life together, and raising a family together (if God allows children to be born). What God has joined, man cannot separate without having to answer to God for that choice.

## **2. Marriage is sacred and binding**

Matthew 5:31–32; Deuteronomy 24:1–4; Jeremiah 3:1; Mark 10:2–9; Matthew 19:3–9;

Although Moses had permitted divorce among the Jewish people "because of their hardness of heart" (Matthew 19:8), simply requiring the discontented husband to provide his wife with a certificate of divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1, 3), Jesus again wanted to reveal that the external enactments were not the real issue, but the internal attitudes toward marriage were of prime importance. When God made mankind as male and female (Genesis 1:27) and caused them to be joined in "one flesh" (Genesis 2:24) in marriage, such a marital relationship was not to be a provisional arrangement but an indissoluble union intended to portray that the two were becoming one. "God hates divorce" (Malachi 2:16), for it desecrates the expression of His character of unity and love. The Jewish religionists of Jesus' day treated divorce as a triviality, sanctioning divorce with loose interpretations that allowed divorce for any cause, and religionists of subsequent generations have treated divorce as a mere externality as well. Jesus wanted to point out that within the kingdom of God our spiritual regeneration should provide the character to overcome selfishness, evil desires, and the hardness of heart that allowed for easy divorce and sexual impropriety, granting us instead the character of Christ in love and unity and fidelity leading to loving relationships that are not torn asunder. Within the kingdom our marital relationships are to portray the loving unity of the spiritual relationship between Christ, the Bridegroom and His bride, the Church (Ephesians 5:23, 29, 32).

In this study, our Lord shows that marriage, is indissoluble, and should be so: by divine institution, Matthew 19:4; by express commandment, Matthew 19:5; because the married couple becomes one and the same person, Matthew 19:6; by the example of the first pair, Matthew 19:8; and because of the evil consequent on separation, Matthew 19:9.

## **3. Divorce and remarriage**

Matthew 5:31–32; Matthew 10:8–9; Mark 10:5–12; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:3; I Corinthians 7:10–11; Malachi 2:14–16

When God designed marriage, it didn't have in it the loophole for divorce. God designed marriage to be a permanent relationship until death, and anything less insults marriage and the One Who designed it. When Jesus appealed to Genesis, the Pharisees asked Him why it was permitted at all, and Jesus responded that it was the "*hardness of their hearts*". Jesus does not, however, say that hardness of heart is a valid reason to divorce. Furthermore, after saying that, He makes a very clear statement by saying, "*but it was not like that from the beginning*". Since it was not like this from the beginning, then to get a divorce would be to sin, because it violates God's standard for marriage. Mere difficulty in marriage is not, for Jesus' followers, grounds for divorce but difficulties, harsh words spoken at times, deep wells of bad communication, and not knowing how to get along in marriage are all the places where the Lord intends to step in and make us new.

Matthew 5:32 does not teach that remarriage is lawful rather it reaffirms that marriage after divorce is adultery, even for those who have been divorced innocently, and that a man who divorces his wife is guilty of the adultery of her second marriage unless she had already become an adulteress before the divorce. Adultery does not nullify the "one-flesh" relationship of marriage and both the innocent and guilty spouses are prohibited from remarriage. I Corinthians 7:10–11 teaches that divorce is wrong but that if it is inevitable the person who divorces should not remarry. Husband and wife, being joined together by the ordinance of God, are not to be put asunder by any ordinance of man. Let not man put them asunder; not the husband himself, nor any one for him; not the magistrate, God never gave him authority to do it, *He hateth putting away*.