

The Greatest Life Ever Lived

A Study in the Incarnate Life of Jesus Christ and An Exposition of the Four Gospels

LESSON XII : THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT — PART 6: TRUE AND FALSE RIGHTEOUSNESS CONTRASTED

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John	related passages
5:21-32				

General

The phrase “*of them of old time*” could be translated as given (KJV) or it could be “*to the men of long ago*” as preferred by some modern translations (“*to the people long ago*”, NIV). If the word “*to*” is preferred the sense is that Moses in the law said something *to* the fathers and now Jesus “assumes a tone of superiority over the Mosaic regulations.” [Robertson, *Word Pictures*] Those that prefer “*by*” gives the statement the sense that it was said *by* the expounders of the law, the rabbis; i.e. it is an interpretation which is held of which Jesus disagrees. Hendriksen gives the following reasons why he prefers “*by*” rather than “*to*”:

- it would seem odd that Jesus would emphasize that He did not come to set aside the OT then immediately begin to do that very same thing
- if Jesus had been referring to what Moses intended it is likely He would have used different language, e.g. “*Moses commanded*” or “*it is written*”.
- in later Jewish writings such famous rabbis as Hillel and Shammai were called “fathers of antiquity”, so the phrase “*the men of long ago*” would be an excellent description of those that orally interpreted the law for the masses
- although the phrase “*it was said*” could refer to something written, it is more readily associated with oral teaching and tradition than that which had been put down in a document
- the contrast is clearer when “*you have heard ... but I say*” refers to what they were currently being taught than to have a reference to “*they heard ... but I say*”

Murder

Matt 5:21-26 Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

SUMMATION

THE PHARISEES: “Whoever commits the outward physical act of murder is in danger of capital punishment.”

CHRIST: “Sinful anger — the kind that leads to bitter words — is in its very nature murder. Unless he repents, one with that kind of attitude faces eternal punishment regardless of how he appears before men.”

“*Thou shalt not kill*” is a quote from the sixth commandment (Ex 20:13; Deut 5:17), the additional “*whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgement*” is a reference that murder shall be punished by death, a principle found in Gen 9:6. This is correctly (although incompletely) interpreted by the Pharisees to mean whosoever commits the physical act of murder will receive capital punishment. But the application Jesus makes is “resist beginnings”, i.e. that **murder in its very inception in man’s heart is still murder in the eyes of God although the physical act may never be carried out.** “Thus our Lord and King restores the law of God to its true force, and warns us that it denounces not only the overt act of killing, but every thought, feeling, and word which would tend to injure a brother, or annihilate him by contempt. What a sweeping law is this! My conscience might have been easy as to the command ‘Thou shalt not kill’; but if anger without just cause be murder, how shall I answer for it?” [Spurgeon, *Matthew*]

It is probable that Jesus is emphasizing a single sin here rather than three progressive sins. The Pharisees may have been involved in legalistic hair-splitting which would have divided the three into separate categories but it is unlikely Jesus would have taken the same course. It is also hard to understand how someone angry with his brother yet does not reveal that anger would be in danger of the civil court. Dividing the sins into three also obscures that what Jesus is teaching here is the root of the sin, murder in the heart.

WHOSOEVER IS ANGRY WITH HIS BROTHER WITHOUT A CAUSE SHALL BE IN DANGER OF THE JUDGEMENT:

here Jesus points to the very inception of the sin in man's heart (cp James 4:1). Such an attitude is itself a breaking of the sixth commandment and is punishable by death.

WHOSOEVER SHALL SAY TO HIS BROTHER, RACA, SHALL BE IN DANGER OF THE COUNCIL: *Raca* is understood to be an Aramaic word meaning "you blockhead, you empty-head, you good-for-nothing, you vain worthless fellow", a word of great contempt. Whosoever has this spirit of contempt and utter disgust calls his brother *Raca* is worthy of being condemned to death by the Jewish Supreme court, the Sanhedrin.

WHOSOEVER SHALL SAY, THOU FOOL, SHALL BE IN DANGER OF HELL FIRE: when in the same spirit of contempt a person calls his brother a *fool* (Gk: *mōre*, "you idiot, you moron", possibly from the Hebrew word to *rebel, a rebel against God, apostate*; implying among the Jews the most aggravated guilt) he deserves to die. Christ says this person is in danger of the fires of Gehenna, a reference to the final lake of fire and used twelve times in the NT (here for the first time).

THE OT DID EMPHASIZE THE SPIRITUAL APPLICATION THE PHARISEES OVERLOOKED: Moses emphasized love for God (Deut 6:5) and for man (Lev 19:18). The very first story of murder in the OT (Cain and Abel, Gen 4:1-16) emphasized jealousy as being the motive for the murder. Anger is elsewhere warned against (Prov 14:17; 22:24; 25:23; Eccl 7:9; Job 5:2; Jonah 4:4).

WHILE A BELIEVER MAY SIN WITH THOUGHTS OF HATRED, GOD WILL WORK THOSE EMOTIONS OUT OF THE BELIEVER AND BRING THAT ONE INTO COMPLIANCE WITH HIS WILL. None may claim absolute purity along these lines. We are sinners and often immediately react as sinners. *But the Lord will not allow His children to remain in that attitude of mind.* For example (used by permission): the assistant Pastor of a church had his seventeen-year-old daughter raped and murdered. After the man was captured, the assistant Pastor said he would dwell upon ways of torturing the murderer. The assistant Pastor told me he was sitting at work one day (prior to him entering the ministry) thinking these thoughts when the Lord revealed to him he was as bad as the other man! The assistant Pastor repented and received the peace only Christ can give. This is the intent of Christ's words here. *Unseen by men but obvious to God.*

Matt 5:23-26 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing. : Jesus changes from the second person plural ("you, ye" in v21,22) to the singular ("you" in v23-26) while making application to the individuals' specific situations. What does Jesus' teaching have to do with our day-by-day activities? The "therefore" that Jesus begins with makes it clear that this is connected with what He had just taught. **"A religion, the very essence of which is love, cannot suffer at its altars a heart that is revengeful and uncharitable, or which does not use its utmost endeavors to revive love in the heart of another."** [Clarke, *Commentary*] The same principle is taught in the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:12,14) and in the parable concerning the unforgiving debtor (Matt 18:23-35).

Practically speaking, the brother "having something against thee" is **probably some importance grievance** rather than just anything since if that were true there would be few acts of worship and devotion! I agree with those that say this need not be a *righteous* grievance, i.e., that if there's a reason for my brother to have something against me I should stop and get it right, but if he's just imagining things that's his problem! I believe and agree with those that teach **we have an obligation to try and be reconciled with a brother even though he is dissatisfied with me without cause.** If the opponent refuses to be fair after we have done all to be reconciled, it is then that the guilt rests on them alone. "Then, when either thy brother is reconciled to thee, or thou hast done all in thy power to effect this reconciliation. My own obstinacy and uncharitableness must render me utterly unfit to receive any good from God's hands, or to worship Him in an acceptable manner; but the wickedness of another can be no hindrance to me, when I have endeavored earnestly to get it removed, though without effect." [Clarke, *Commentary*]

Jesus continues His illustration with the principle that **our reconciliation cannot wait — the time is now!** The picture changes a little from one who has something against you to one who has already began the legal proceedings. Everything possible should be done to "settle this out of court", hence, privately without the involvement of others. If this is not done the point of Jesus' illustration is there will be no forgiveness until the last penny is paid, i.e. *never*. **The person who does not make an earnest attempt at reconciliation may find himself in a position to never be forgiven.**

Adultery

Matt 5:27,28 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

SUMMATION

THE PHARISEES: "Do not commit the outward physical act of adultery."

CHRIST: "Everyone who is looking at a woman in order to indulge his sexual passion for her, already committed adultery with her in his heart."

THE OT DID EMPHASIZE THE SPIRITUAL APPLICATION THE PHARISEES OVERLOOKED: Moses stated that adultery was sin in the seventh commandment (Ex 20:14; Deut 5:18) yet it should have been explained in the context of the tenth commandment which stated not to covet thy neighbor's wife (Ex 20:17; Deut 5:21). The book of Proverbs has much to say about sexual temptation.

WHOSOEVER LOOKETH ON A WOMAN TO LUST AFTER HER: the sin is not in a mere glance or happening to see one of the opposite sex. Rather the sin is in "looking, gazing, staring at a woman in order to lust after her, to possess and dominate her completely, to use her for his own pleasure." [Hendriksen, *Matthew*] **For some reason this seems to be a sin peculiar to males.** On the whole women are usually led astray by thoughts of companionship, security or stability rather than purely physical desires. Perhaps for this reason there is much in Proverbs warning men not being taken by women's outward beauty, by the flirting glances, etc. **Women, please forgive the men but this is a temptation which apparently is with them all of their lives.** I have found as I discuss this with men more elderly than myself that they still need to control their thoughts. It is apparently not something which goes away as the body ages. **It is my further conviction that this (in a sense) is a normal desire which afflicts all men.** I say normal not in the sense to excuse sin but that the natural desire for a woman is not in itself sin. The sin occurs when men embrace the temptation and thoughts, mentally pursuing that which the Lord describes as adultery within our hearts. For a man to deny having such thoughts would be (I believe) to brand the man a homosexual, a liar or one having medical problems.

- *Women: for the sake of your marriages, please be understanding towards your husbands. A second glance at an attractive woman does not mean his love for you is waning! It may be the better part of wisdom to not make too big a problem out of such a glance. The glances will always be there, and perhaps prayer for your husband to control his thoughts would be more effective than a slap up side the head.*

- *Men: the initial first glance is not sin, nor is perhaps the second. But between you and the Lord, you know when your thoughts begin to stray into areas of infidelity. Jesus clearly condemns the "there's no harm in looking" philosophy so it becomes a question of willingly sinning or being obedient. Bring your thoughts under subjection of the cross. Always keep in mind the Lord is fully aware of your desires regardless of what you may tell others. The Lord may not condemn the desire since that is part of our "programming" as males, but He also does not excuse us when we do not control those desires. "Lust not after her beauty in your heart" (Prov 6:25).*

ADULTERY here is needless to say as much of a sin for a woman as for the man. Marital unfaithfulness is always wrong, including an unmarried person attempting to disrupt the marriage of another. "In the proper setting sex is a wonderful gift of God. However, for lewdness and vulgarity there is no excuse. It is wrong always and everywhere, for the unmarried as well as the married." [Hendriksen, *Matthew*] While this verse may be directed more towards men than women, every woman should ask herself if the clothing she is wearing is appropriately modest. This is not to excuse the men for some sin in their hearts regardless of how a woman is dressed, but I have also witnessed women spending the entire church service tugging at their skirts or fixing their blouses. **Immodesty, flirting, illicit thoughts is a sin whether the person is male or female.**

Matt 5:29-30 *And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.*

THIS CANNOT BE TAKEN LITERALLY for even if a person were to cut out his right eye he could still lust with the left eye, and a person with one hand still is capable of lust. In another passage Jesus states the same slightly differently which provides the key. In Matt 18:7-9 the eye and hand symbolize the "occasions of stumbling" or "enticements to do wrong, temptations and allurements". The general meaning is **we are to take drastic measures to get rid of that which would tempt us to sin.** "The word *offend* carries to the English reader the sense of *giving offense, provoking...causeth to stumble*. The kindred noun is skandalon, ... the stick in a trap on which the bait is place, and which springs up and shuts the trap at the touch of an animal. Hence, generally, a *snare*, a *stumbling-block*. Christ's meaning here is: 'If your eye or your hand serve as an obstacle or trap to ensnare or make you fall in your moral walk.' How the *eye* might do this may be seen in the previous verse. Bengel observes: 'He who, when his eye proves a stumbling-block, takes care not to see, does in reality blind himself.' " [Vincent, *Word Studies*] "Holiness is to be our first object: everything else must take a very secondary place. Right eyes and right hands are no longer right if they lead us wrong. Even hands and eyes must go, that we may not offend our God by them. Yet, let no man read this literally, and therefore mutilate his body, as some foolish fanatics have done. The real meaning is clear enough. Lord, I love thee better than my eyes and hands: let me never demur for a moment to the giving up of all for thee!" [Spurgeon, *Matthew*]

Other lessons found within these verses:

- **this present life is only a prelude of the life to come.** After this life is either an eternity in heaven or hell.

● **nothing which we deem the most precious in this life is worth endangering the eternal future.** The right eye and the right hand is given to mean that which was precious, and often in the OT the conquering army would gouge out the right eye of the captured soldiers since it would prevent them from looking around their shields in battle. “We must shut our senses against dangerous objects, to avoid the occasions of sin, and deprive ourselves of all that is most dear and profitable to us, in order to save our souls, when we find that these dear and profitable things, however innocent in themselves, cause us to sin against God.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

● **we are not to pamper and toy with sin.** Christ says to cast away temptation immediately and totally. We are not to allow the second look, the magazines with lewd pictures must be destroyed, some of the films we allow ourselves to watch must be turned off. It has been well said: **no person falls into sin, it is an advancing slide into sin which begins in our thoughts.** “Men often part with some members of the body, at the discretion of a surgeon, that they may preserve the trunk, and die a little later; and yet they will not deprive themselves of a look, a touch, a small pleasure, which endanger the eternal death of the soul. It is not enough to shut the eye, or stop the hand; the one must be plucked out, and the other cut off. Neither is this enough, we must cast them both from us. Not one moment’s truce with an evil passion, or a sinful appetite. If you indulge them, they will gain strength, and you shall be ruined. The rabbis have a saying similar to this: ‘It is better for thee to be scorched with a little fire in this world, than to be burned with a devouring fire in the world to come.’ “ [Clarke, *Commentary*]

● **the pleasures of sin is not worthy to be compared to the glories of heaven.** Jesus says it is *more profitable* for us to cast away the sin than to give in to the sin. Sin does have its fleshly pleasures (Heb 11:25) but is destructive and separates us from God. Turning from the sin that allures will provide heavenly blessings beyond our dreams.

● **the advice given to sexual temptation is not to stand and fight but rather to run (2 Tim 2:22).** Jesus says to cast it away from our presence. **Refusing to remove the means of temptation is actually a hidden desire to give in to the temptation.**

Divorce

Matt 5:31,32 It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: but I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

SUMMATION

THE PHARISEES: “Divorce may be granted as long as a certificate of divorce is properly issued.”

CHRIST: “What God has joined together, let man not separate.”

“Let me begin by pointing out that, when we come to a subject and passage like this, we see the value of a systematic study of the teaching of Scripture. How often do we hear an address on a text such as this? Is it not true to say that this is the kind of subject that preachers tend to avoid? And thereby, of course, we are guilty of sin. **It is not for us to study some parts of the Word of God and to ignore others; it is not for us to shy at difficulties.** These verses that we are now considering are as much the Word of God as anything else which is to be found in the Scriptures.” [Lloyd-Jones, *Sermon*]

MARRIAGE FROM THE BEGINNING WAS THE JOINING OF ONE MAN AND ONE WOMAN FOR LIFE. This is clearly presented in the OT in many places (Gen 2:24; 24:67; Ex 20:14; Deut 5:18; Mal 2:14-16). The implication from Jesus’ words in Matt 19:6 (quoted in the summation above) is that **all marriages are providentially a product of the hand of God; therefore there are unseen spiritual reasons why any couple marries and to tear that asunder is to violate the purpose of God.** There are no “accidental” marriages and in one sense everyone who is married has the partner God directed them to have (the only possible exception would be a Christian directly violating scripture and marrying an unbeliever; yet even in a sense that marriage has a purpose in the providence of God). God has a reason behind every marriage even if it is not immediately apparent to others. In the Matt 5 passage of today’s lesson, note **Jesus was not making this statement to highlight the exception that would allow a couple to divorce. Rather Jesus was placing the emphasis on the “spirit of the law”: marriage was for life and any breaking of that commitment was the sin of adultery.** It is a sad illustration of our sinful human natures that we immediately “key in to” the exception mentioned, as if mankind is saying “*I agree there should be a fidelity in marriage, but how far can I go and it still not be sin?*” When confronted in Matt 19:3-9 Jesus stated the Mosaic allowance was due to the hardness of the people’s hearts, therefore **any divorce is due to our hard hearts and is preventable if there is submission to the Holy Spirit and the word of God. Fidelity is the emphasis, even when forgiveness and restoration may be necessary. For a believer to place the emphasis elsewhere is to return to the spirit of the Pharisees.** “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. But those who marry as passion or money lead the way, may be justly considered adulterers and adulteresses as long as they live.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

{I must insert a personal note at this point. I am not making these statements with a “holier-than-thou” attitude, looking down my nose self-righteously at those who are having difficulties in their marriage. Divorce has touch my family in many areas: my wife and I have close family members who have been through several divorces, we have close family members who are single parents, we have close family members who are in what may be called a “bad marriage”, and I personally come from a broken home. We know the heart-ache which accompanies real-life situations, the tearful phone-calls when one doesn’t have the answers, the effects on children of a broken home. I also pray the Lord does not ever test my wife’s and my relationship in such a fashion because I’d be scared to death of the consequences. But scripture is scripture! Either we believe and accept what the Lord is teaching or we become those who He preached against. It must be taught in love, it must be taught with a broken heart, it must be taught with fear and trembling, but it must be taught!}

THE EXCEPTION PERMITTING DIVORCE IS INFIDELITY ONLY. The “letter of the law kills” and it is best to not place hard-fast rules; however, as we must look at what the Lord says concerning divorce, we are forced to make “guidelines”. Note **the adulterous sin does not demand divorce since the Christian message of grace and forgiveness still applies.** Yet “this is the only case in which, according to Christ’s unambiguous assertion, a man may dismiss his wife without being involved in the sin which Jesus proceeds to characterize as making his wife to be an adulteress.” [Murray, *Divorce*] “The exception to which Jesus refers in Matt 5:32 permits divorce only then when one of the contracting parties, here the wife, by means of marital unfaithfulness (‘fornication’) rises in rebellion against the very essence of the marriage bond.... Matthew was writing primarily to Jews among whom the rejection of a wife by her husband was well-known, but not vice-versa. Mark, writing to Gentiles, includes both possibilities (Mk 10:11,12). But naturally Matt 5:32 *applies* to the wife who ‘puts away’ her husband as well as to the husband who does the same to his wife.” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*]

THE PHARISEES DID OBEY THE LETTER OF THE LAW: there were two general schools of thought concerning divorce among the Jews of Jesus’ day: “The Jewish doctors gave great license in the matter of divorce. Among them, a man might divorce his wife if she displeased him even in the dressing of his victuals! Rabbi Akiba said, ‘If any man saw a woman handsomer than his own wife, he might put his wife away; because it is said in the law, If she find not favor in his eyes.’ Deut 24:1.... These cases are sufficient to show to what a scandalous and criminal excess this matter was carried among the Jews. However, it was allowed by the school of Shammai, that no man was to put away his wife unless for adultery. The school of Hillel gave much greater license.” [Clarke, *Commentary*] The fact there were two opposing sides of the divorce issue is probably the reason behind the Pharisees’ question of Jesus in Matt 19:3. Moses did write in Deut 24:1-4 that if a divorce was desired there had to be a bill of divorcement, but Moses’ purpose was far from an endorsement of divorce. The reason behind the passage was two-fold:

- *to attempt to control a situation which had gotten out of hand.* “Men were wont to bid their wives ‘begone’, and a hasty word was thought sufficient as an act of divorce. Moses insisted upon ‘a writing of divorcement’ that angry passions might have time to cool, and that the separation, if it must come, might be performed with deliberation and legal formality. The requirement of a writing was to a certain degree a check upon an evil habit, which was so ingrained in the people that to refuse it altogether would have been useless, and would only have created another crime. The law of Moses went as far as it could practically be enforced; it was because of the hardness of their hearts that divorce was tolerated: it was never approved.” [Spurgeon, *Matthew*]
- *Moses wrote as a warning that one who divorced his wife better think twice because he was not to re-marry her if another man takes her as his wife, even if that man divorces her or dies.* Concerning Deut 24:1-4: “This passage does not make divorce mandatory in the case of the indecency or uncleanness concerned. It is not even to be understood as encouraging or advising men to put away their wives in such a case. Neither is it to be understood as an authorizing or sanctioning of divorce. It simply provides that if a man puts away his wife and she marries another man the former husband cannot under any conditions take her to be his wife.” [Murray, *Divorce*]

The Pharisees was therefore not guilty *per se* of violating the scriptures because they did require a bill of divorcement. **The problem of the Pharisees was they missed the spirit of the writing, placing the emphasis on the procedure according to the letter of the law rather than on marriage being a permanent relationship. It is this taking the “letter of the law” which the Lord is correcting throughout this section of the Sermon on the Mount.**

WHOSOEVER PUTS AWAY HIS WIFE CAUSES HER TO COMMIT ADULTERY: the general reading would imply unfairness for why should an innocent wife rejected by her husband, disgraced and being forced to face life alone, must be branded by an adulteress? One solution is that by divorcing her *she may easily become an adulteress*. Another solution is that the word for adultery is taken passively with the sense of “*whoever divorces his wife exposes her to adultery*”. “What Jesus is saying, then, is this: whoever divorces his wife except on the ground of infidelity must bear the chief responsibility if as a result she, in her deserted state, should immediately yield to the temptation of becoming married to someone else. The erring husband should be given an opportunity to correct his error, that is, to go back to his wife. This also explains the closing clause, according to which anyone who rushes in to marry the deserted wife is involving himself in — hence, is committing — adultery. It was thus that Jesus counteracted the looseness in morals prevailing in His day.” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*]

SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES CONCERNING DIVORCE (Gen 2:23,24; Deut 24:1-4; Matt 5:31,32; 19:3-12; Mk 10:2-12; Lk

- marriage in its purest form is meant to be a life-long contractual agreement between a man and a woman
- a man or a woman may (note it is not demanded) only legitimately divorce in the event of a spouse committing adultery
- a man or a woman who divorces for reasons other than adultery has not obtained a legitimate divorce
- a man or a woman who is the guilty party of an illegitimate divorce is not at liberty to remarry but commits adultery if he / she remarries
- a man or a woman who marries a guilty party of an illegitimate divorce is committing the act of adultery
- a divorced couple may remarry each other as long as there has been no other marriage, this being looked upon as a mending of the original faction
- the above principles hold true of all people regardless of their relationship to Christ (i.e., to both the saved and the lost, although admittedly the unsaved would not care what the scriptures say concerning divorce in the first place)
- if one has become a Christian after marriage and is now married to an unbeliever, the Christian may not initiate nor induce the separation of the unbeliever; however if the unbeliever departs the Christian is not under bondage to maintain that relationship
- the Christian is warned in the strongest terms against taking an unbeliever in marriage

REMARriage is not directly addressed in any scripture of which I am aware. There are good godly men on both sides of this issue so the decision is not between orthodoxy / liberalism. It should also be noted that the arguments used by these men are not based upon direct commands of scripture; their arguments are either derived from real-life situations or logically deduced from what they see as an interpretation of scripture. Without clear scriptural commands one way or another, one cannot be overly dogmatic. Perhaps the best I could do is repeat comments from one whom I have repeatedly looked to for guidance. He is fully aware of the controversial aspects, has no answer which he could say was based solely on a clear command from scripture, and suggests the best principle to follow in this instance might be Paul's words in 1 Cor 7:8,9, "It is good to stay unmarried, as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion."

SECOND-CLASS CHRISTIANS? As a church wavers from a balanced approach to divorce, two errors commonly occur. In some circles the divorced are looked down upon as if a great unpardonable sin has occurred. In other circles the issue is overlooked to the degree that it is no longer considered a sin. Principles to consider:

- **Officially as a church body the divorce issue must be considered the sin which Jesus portrayed it to be.** Any church not taking a stand against divorce is condoning the sin. It would be impossible to place hard-fast rules which would apply to every situation, but any professing Christian couple having marital problems should place the priority on keeping the marriage together. The church should provide help to the extent of which it is capable, including possibly seeking the aid of professional Christian counselors (providing they hold to what the scriptures teach concerning marriage and divorce). **The church's priority should be to prevent the disruption of the marriage vows.** If one or both of the spouses refuses to respond or participate and was determined to break the marriage vows, the church body should consider the decision to be one of adultery based upon passages already discussed and church discipline should be pursued. **If Jesus called the breaking of the marital vows adultery, the church should respond as it would if a member was involved in an affair.** As all discipline it should be the last measure, it should be done with prayer and a broken heart, and it should be done with the purpose of bringing the erring one back to the fold. There is no place for self-righteousness, condemnation, nor judgmental attitudes. If one came for membership who was under the discipline of another church for divorce, our church should approach the situation as it would any involving discipline. What is the circumstances behind the discipline? What is the other church's pastor's comments on the discipline? Has there been repentance on the part of the disciplined member? **Such a stand may serve as a warning for others, emphasize to our young the importance of the marriage vows, and keep the church pure from the sin Jesus describes.**
- **Individually the church body must reach out as it would to any believer: in love, spiritual support, and friendship based upon our common salvation.** No believer is without sin and divorce is not a sin greater than other sins. As we seek to serve the Lord, we all must maintain scriptural attitudes of preferring others above ourselves, forgiveness of offenses towards ourselves, etc. For both the "innocent" and the "guilty" party in a divorce (are there such things?) the goal of our relationship towards them should be to restore them to a place of obedience and fellowship with the Lord for His glory.
- **The delicate balance therefore is maintaining the purity Christ demands for a church body while also maintaining the proper attitudes of forgiveness, love, understanding and compassion for those who are hurt and having difficulties.** On one hand: as God cannot use individuals whose lives are not right in His eyes, God cannot use an impure church. Sin in the camp disrupts the work of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand: the mind of Christ is one of compassion for the lost and straying ones. "There should be no division in the body, but ... its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it..." (1 Cor 12:25b, 26a). "Brothers if someone is

caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself." (Gal 6:1-3) "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interest of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." (Phil 2:3-5)

DIVORCE IN THE MINISTRY: taught almost without exception among Christian churches is the qualification that men in the ministry must have never been divorced (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6). Those questioning such an interpretation usually ask why that one particular sin is emphasized. One reason may be that **if a man has a problem controlling his heart's desires towards women, the pulpit will become the place of flirtation and eventual shame for the cause of Christ.** Another reason is that **certain relationships are pictures of spiritual truths.** For example: the OT said only lambs without blemish or spot may be sacrificed. I can imagine an OT Jew rationalizing, "what difference does it make? It will only be killed anyway, why take the best of my herd? Why not this lame one over there? A sacrifice is a sacrifice!" But by doing that the Jews did not realize they were destroying a spiritual picture of the perfect Lamb of God. So this "meaningless" stipulation placed by the Lord did have a great significance that they in their spiritual blindness failed to see. The same applies to marriage and divorce. Whenever there is divorce, there are **social implications** because now there's legalities involved, typically children are affected, others in the family affected, etc. There are **emotional implications** for the Lord has said it's not good for man to be alone (Gen 2:18) and few can live without emotional support. There are **spiritual implications** as well. Not only individually as that person may struggle why the Lord allowed such a thing to happen to them and perhaps even blame Him. But divorce also weakens the picture the Lord's given to illustrate the relationship between Him and His people. The fact that Christ is the bridegroom would have little meaning to a young person who's parents just went through a divorce. "Is that Jesus? Will Jesus one day desert me?"

DEACONS AND DIVORCE: typical among churches that believe a pastor may not be divorced is the stand a deacon may never have been divorced. I have heard some men through the years complain at this teaching since they had been divorced and this eliminated them as a potential deacon. I see two problems with that mindset:

- the first is on the part of the man desiring the office of a deacon: **the fact there is a disgruntled spirit and lack of humility disqualifies that person from being a deacon regardless of their divorce status!** A scriptural deacon is a humble servant, one who gives of himself to relieve the mundane responsibilities from the pastor so the pastor may devote himself to prayer and the study of the word. Among many of our churches however the office has become an elevated position of prestige, something bestowed upon only the most "holy" and "spiritual" men. Rather than being a servant, the attitude of many is it is a spiritual honorarium. *"I have been faithful in my church attendance, I have tithed and gave offerings over and above my tithe, I have been involved in many extra activities of the church, and now I would like to be recognized for the spiritual man I am!"* **If a scriptural deacon is one who serves humbly out of love for the Lord, why is it important if that is recognized by an official title? There is nothing a scriptural deacon does that cannot be done by one who is not an official deacon.** If one wishes to serve to help the pastor, no title is necessary. The very attitude of "I am worthy and deserve such an honor" as well as the hurt since the title is not given shows a motive not aligned with the word of God.
- the second erroneous mindset is on the part of the church itself: **the office of a deacon is a place of service to free the pastoral staff from the every-day duties of the church, not a governing board that runs the church.** Practically speaking it would be natural these men would be close to the pastor and undoubtedly many conversations would take place as to what to do in the church, about the direction of the church, etc. But the church is a democratic assembly of believers, each of which have a vote. The pastor is not the dictator nor is the deacons the governing body. Therefore it is as much an error on the church that elevates the office of a deacon to an inappropriate place as it is for men to then seek such an office. If the deacons run the church, there will always be those who look upon the office as something which should be strived after as one would "candidate" for any office. It is natural therefore the divorced would feel ostracized for not being "qualified to run the church". The one error leads to the other.